



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

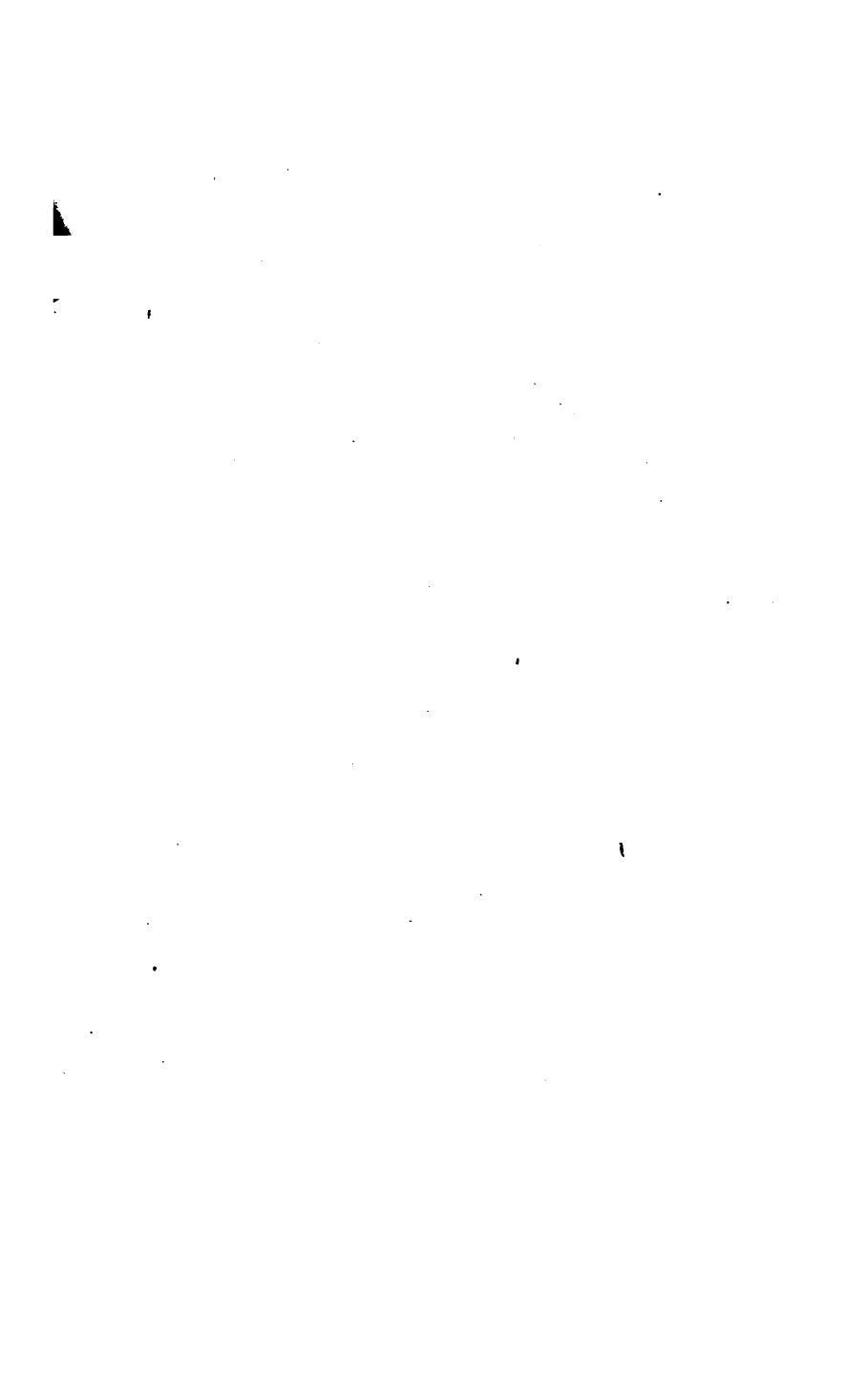
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3433 07575662 1



NCW
Tuck





NEW
Tuck



ANGENETTE

The Bald Knobbers

A romantic and historical novel

BY

CLYDE EDWIN TUCK

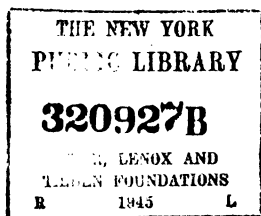
Author of "For Love of You," Etc.

With illustrations by
WILL VAWTER

3
INDIANAPOLIS:
B. F. BOWEN & COMPANY
1910.

P

C L C



Copyright, 1910,

By Clyde Edwin Tuck.

Published in September.

TO
MY MOTHER,
WHOSE HIGH CHRISTIAN ATTRIBUTES ARE
ALONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LITTLE GOOD
THAT I CAN CLAIM, THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

Revised - 22 June, 1955

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	Page
Frontispiece, "Angenette"	
"This pretty sylvan scene is made homelike by here and there a cabin"	53
"The rapid river upon its pebbly bars—"	117
"The rocky road that wound through the mountains"	193
Cornelia Burwell's first mission of mercy	290

CONTENTS

Chapter.	Page.
I. ANGENETTE	9
II. THE RIVALS	15
III. A LEGACY REJECTED	23
IV. HEARD AT THE CROSS-ROADS STORE	28
V. THE TEST OF A HERO.....	39
VI. THE TREASURE CAVE	51
VII. A NIGHT IN WILD CAT HOLLOW..	63
VIII. THE STORY OF A GREAT SACRI- FICE	71
IX. A FOREST SANCTUARY	83
X. LOVE AGAINST HATE	95
XI. THE WESSEX CLUB	106
XII. THE SHOT FROM THE BUSH.....	116
XIII. THE PROPOSAL	130
XIV. WHEN LOVE HAS WANED	139
XV. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	152
XVI. AN AUTUMN WALK	164
XVII. A NARROW ESCAPE	175
XVIII. A SOCIAL GATHERING ON BUZ- ZARD RIDGE	194
XIX. THE CRIME	213
XX. A RECONCILIATION	220
XXI. A CONSPIRACY	232

CONTENTS—Continued.

Chapter.	Page.
XXII. THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS.....	243
XXIII. THE TABLES TURNED	259
XXIV. FREEDOM REFUSED	276
XXV. AN ANGEL OF MERCY	286
XXVI. LIFE'S TRAGEDY	293
XXVII. THE TRIAL	302
XXVIII. THE TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL	317

FOREWORD

This is not a "blood and thunder" story, embodying the deeds of a band of outlaws; nor is it an attempt at an accurate history of the Bald Knobbers. It is rather a pastoral romance, founded partly on the acts of some of the members of that mysterious organization which first came into prominence in Taney County, Missouri, the wildest part of the Ozark Mountains and the birth-place of this order of masked regulators. In an early day lawlessness caused the formation of "The Law and Order League" by the law-abiding citizens, later known as "The Bald Knobbers" from the fact that the members lived among the "balds" and "knobs" of the mountains. It was an organization similar to the Ku Klux Klan of South Carolina, having for its object the protection of life and property. All new-comers were invited to join the order, and most of them did so. The candidate for Bald Knobber honors was compelled to pass through a trying ordeal. Instead of being quietly sworn into some fraternal organization composed of his neighbors, as he had anticipated, the candidate found himself at midnight in a lonely ravine or on a hill crest surrounded by hundreds of hideously masked men, who imposed upon him a blood-curdling vow, the breaking of which was punishable by death. Once a member he could never desert the organization and remain in that section of the country alive.

This league was composed principally of military men, ex-United States soldiers who had served in

the Civil War. The first leader, Nathaniel N. Kinney, had been a captain of a West Virginia company of cavalry. He was a physical giant, a born leader of men, a man in whom such a union of craftiness and audacity, fortitude and bravery, had seldom been known. He had absolute control of the organization, which soon spread to Christian, Stone and Douglas Counties, in fact, embracing at one time almost the whole of southwestern Missouri, and claiming thousands of members.

The organization did not permit of pillaging, highway robberies or unwarranted depredations of any kind; but the regulators took the law in their own hands after several murders had been committed and the alleged murderers permitted to go free, the members of the league seeking to administer justice wherever they deemed it was needed, regardless of decisions of courts. Finally some individuals took advantage of the power of the organization to wreak vengeance on personal enemies, which resulted in trouble for the entire league. The hatred of the militia being incurred, a feud sprang up which resulted in many deaths on both sides; even the first and principal leader, Chief Kinney, was assassinated. The massacre of the household of an innocent and influential old southern family during a raid of the Bald Knobbers aroused the state authorities, and Governor David R. Francis had the guilty ones run down, many of whom were hanged or imprisoned, and the organization was permanently dissolved in 1889 after having held almost supreme power for a period of five years.

C. E. T.

The Bald Knobbers

CHAPTER I

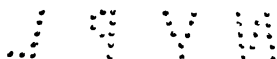
ANGENETTE

Although the earth was clothed with the verdure of early May, the air was pervaded with a slight crispness which is not unusual in the Ozark region at the approach of night during the spring months. The sun had just set and a purple twilight began to creep up the valleys when Angenette Clifton stood at a high, narrow window of an old-fashioned house looking at the branches of the ancient woods outlined against the sky, which was momentarily undergoing a wondrous transformation, such as few can appreciate who have never beheld one of those rare sunsets in the Ozarks.

She saw, between clumps of trees, far to the west, the clear waters of White River glimmer in the receding light, then grow steely dark—an emblem, she thought, of the current of her own being—subject to diverse moods. Just as a few moments ago the river caught and held the last rays of the sun which crimsoned its bosom with a warm, ruddy glow, now so somber, scarcely reflecting a single

beam of light, so was the change within her own heart. Looking from the river again to the sky, where only a faint trace of the rose and amber lingered, she saw the dim but steady light of the evening star, and she sighed for such a mood of constancy and patience—so different from that of the river. She had never before experienced such feelings as now swept over her; her heart felt an emotion new and strange, and the dreams that thronged her brain were more fantastic than even her imaginative girlhood had ever known. Why was this so? She could not answer the self-imposed question, but she instinctively knew that she stood at the parting of the ways; that today marked a milestone in her life. She longed more than ever before to look beyond the blue-rimmed horizon of the mountains, to know more of the mysterious, throbbing life of the great world which lay just over the borders of her own. She yearned for a part in its larger affairs and for more varied and interesting experiences. She felt like a caged eagle with the boundless sky above it, but restrained from exploring its depths and experiencing the delights found there by the more fortunate of its kind.

But Angenette wished most of all that she could see again her benefactor of a few hours previous and hear again his soft voice, so different from the coarse tones which she had been accustomed to hear among the hill folk. She wondered whether she would see him if she should ride again tomorrow to the distant post-office, from which she had been returning when Cricket, her little black pony, stum-



bled on a loose rock, because she let the bridle reins hang too low while looking over the week-old mail. The saddle, turning to one side, compelled her to dismount and she leaped lightly to the ground. Only a quick "Whoa" rang out, and Cricket stopped after he had shied at the letters and papers which fell to the roadside.

Angenette did not notice the approach of a man riding a large chestnut-sorrel horse who, shortly after her mishap, turned the corner of the narrow road that wound through the woods beneath the brow of the hill skirting the river. It was Bernard Westbrook, the first member of the Wessex Club to visit their club-house on White River this season, this organization of St. Louis business and professional men having just opened their new bungalow in this quiet retreat.

"I beg your pardon, lady; are you hurt? may I assist you?" said the man as he swung gracefully from his saddle.

Angenette turned suddenly upon hearing the strange voice address her. She was evidently confused upon discovering that it was none of her neighbors, but a stranger, the handsomest and best dressed she had ever seen. She could not easily compose herself to say with a half-smothered laugh as she turned to the man beside her from her efforts to readjust the saddle:

"Oh, it's nothing; I'm not hurt at all, thank you."

Westbrook was scarcely less amazed than the girl when she looked at him from under the broad

brim of a white "Cheyenne" hat, patterned very much like those worn by the young men of the mountains. Her face, which had already been carmined by the sun and wind, was more highly tinted than usual as a result of her temporary excitement. Such eyes—such wonderfully expressive, large, luminous brown eyes—he was sure he had never seen their equal! What simplicity, wealth of soul, yet wide range of emotions, lay in their clear, liquid depths! Her features were strong, but not bold; a perfect mouth, a wealth of soft black hair, worn in a manner which indicated an unconventional air, with here and there a short, dainty curl. Her figure was superb, replete with liveness, suppleness and grace. She was tall, even for the young women of the mountains. She would have made a striking appearance on the streets of any city.

Westbrook apparently took more time than was necessary in readjusting the saddle, from time to time glancing furtively at the remarkable country beauty as she stood on a little knoll near by, lightly knocking the dust from her skirt with a small quirt, suspended from her wrist. She was a skilled horsewoman from long practice, and she stepped upon a flat limestone rock lying beside the road, as if about to mount her pony in her accustomed graceful manner, when she hesitated and turned to Westbrook with a look of inquiry, but the latter was just then extending his hand, and with his usual ease lifted her to the saddle and stood for a moment with bared head; then he handed to her the letters she had dropped. He had half a mind to glance at the ad-

dress on an envelope in an effort to ascertain her name, but the rudeness of such an act suddenly restrained him and he inquired:

"You will pardon me, I am sure, if you think me bold in asking your name?"

After she had told him, she read from a card which he handed to her in a business-like way, "Bernard Westbrook, Attorney and Counselor-at-Law, St. Louis, Mo."

With minute nicety and as fine an unconcern as if she were quite alone, Angenette now sat upon her pony composedly, but inwardly experiencing a peculiar sensation as the blood coursed with accelerated speed through her veins; for that innate, inscrutable something that all women seem to possess and which enables them to hide their real feelings when they think it best to do so, is to be found in the rural districts as well as among the more cultured of the metropolis.

"May I inquire whether you live near here, and if you pass this way often?" Westbrook said after he had mounted his horse.

"Oh, yes; I live just over the ridge to the right, by the road about two miles, but only a short distance by the little trail which I usually take through the woods, and I ride almost every day."

"Then may I hope that this meeting will not be our last, and that I may not be presumptuous in looking forward to a time when we may ride together, in the near future? for since we have discovered that we are neighbors we might become better acquainted and eventually know more of each other."

"Indeed, I hope so," replied the girl as they parted, she going on up the hill through the forest, and the man continuing his course toward the river bottoms. As he rode down the hill he said to himself: "She is certainly an extraordinary country girl."

To Angenette Clifton, Bernard Westbrook appeared as the ideal of her girlhood dreams. He was young, athletic in build, finely proportioned; his broad shoulders and deep chest indicated physical strength; his clear-cut features bespoke determination, fortitude, courage; his keen blue eyes, which shone with a steady, piercing light, indicated sagacity and cleverness, and his splendid forehead, above which waved light brown hair, showed that an unusually brilliant intellect was back of it, and withal he possessed that rare quality—magnetism. She was sure she had never seen such another—he was so different in every way from the hill folk she knew.

"How very handsome he is: I wonder if I will see him again—and yet why should it matter?" she thought, for he had lived in a world of which she knew but little, only what others had told her and what she had read and dreamed—never experienced. "And have I not been taught to avoid strangers; that men are often not what they seem; I should at least know that he could be trusted; perhaps, after all, no good would result in a better acquaintance," she concluded.

CHAPTER II

THE RIVALS

It was midnight and White River valley lay sleeping in the beams of a half moon. The earth slumbered, still and deep, as if unconscious of the many blights upon her green surface. The gentle stillness and the pensive beauty, the witching mildness and the serene loneliness, together with other glories which night claims her own, made the scene one of dark, rich, splendid beauty.

Bernard Westbrook sat in a room at the Wessex club-house with one elbow fixed upon a table, while his brow rested heavily upon his left hand. In his right he grasped a time-worn book, a doomed legacy left the world by some wicked soul, that has long since, perhaps, cursed the hand that penned it. Deep thought struggled for mastery upon his face. Each feature enshrined the semblance of the conflict within. His penetrating eye was bent upon the hearth before him, as if to pierce its walls of stone; his forehead was contracted with mental agony, and the compression of his lips wore the smile of bitterness. He sprang from the seat where he long had sat, threw down the hateful volume, and, donning his coat and cap, went out into the night. All was still save the howl of a watch dog miles away. He felt the impressiveness of the scene and

was again lost in thought. He was fighting a bitter fight with his own heart. He had long tried to imagine that he loved Cornelia Burwell, a fashionable society woman of his home city, whose recent faithlessness and duplicity had much to do with his early coming to the country which he hoped would aid him to forget. As he compared her, cold and formal, with the simple unaffected beauty—Angenette Clifton—he was sure no contrast could be greater. Cornelia lived for fashion, her only ambition being to be a recognized leader in the high society with which she had always been identified. She cared far more for material things than for the higher ideals of life. Such qualities of mind and heart did not harmonize with the emotional nature of Westbrook, who loved the artistic and the nobler things which life held for the seekers after truth. And here in the mountains, far away from the refined society which he had always known, he had discovered a nature that seemed to fit into his own, although he was reluctant to admit, even to himself, that this child of nature had impressed him.

Notwithstanding the fact that his conversation with Angenette Clifton had been brief and not of a character to elicit many phases and qualities of mind and heart, Westbrook was a close student of human nature and could read at a glance character and intellect in the face, consequently he knew he was not mistaken in his estimate of the girl. He now thought of many things which he wished he had said to her when he had the opportunity at their first meeting, wondering why they did not come to

him then, why he so often thought of the right thing to say after it was too late.

Such were Westbrook's thoughts when he emerged from the woods through which he had strolled far from the club-house. He had been practically oblivious to his surroundings, neither knowing nor greatly caring where his wanton footsteps led him, until consciousness again asserted itself when he stepped into the road at the very place where he had seen Angenette, and he recalled the incident of their extraordinary meeting. But he was suddenly aroused from his musings, which would have been more in keeping with the vagaries of a school-boy thinking of his first love than the cool business-like deliberations of a man of affairs, when, looking up the hill, he saw, between a gap in the forest, a hundred yards away, a black bulk moving swiftly. He knew it to be a man on horse-back when it came nearer. He was not anxious to meet a stranger at that unseasonable hour in such a lonely place; but having been warned upon his arrival at the club-house against opposing a band of mountaineers, known as the Bald Knobbers, he armed himself before starting on his tramp through the woods, for he had been told that some of the members of the league had of late abused the oath of the organization in using it to seek personal revenge and to gratify their own impulses for lawlessness. Many crimes had recently been attributed to this element, and few of the natives who opposed them cared to meet any of these characters at night alone, knowing that they were a bold band of men

and powerful in both numbers and influence. Westbrook did not know but that he would be mistaken for one of their enemies, a detective or a United States marshal. But before he could decide whether it were best to meet the stranger face to face or endeavor to conceal himself behind a tree, the horse and rider suddenly rounded the hill and were too near to allow him time to get out of the road unobserved. The horse pricked up his ears and shied, but the rider, a tall muscular man, wearing a dark suit, a broad-rimmed hat and jingling spurs, drew himself up from his slouchy position in his immense cow-boy saddle, and giving his horse a slap with the bridle-reins, urged the animal a few steps farther, at the same time throwing back his coat and reaching toward his belt. When he drew out his hand Westbrook could see the gleam of the pale moonlight along the barrel of a revolver. The stranger, who proved to be Wade Drexel, was one of the youngest but most daring of the Bald Knobbers and Angenette Clifton's betrothed.

"You don't impress me as one who belongs in these ridges. What are you doing here? Out with it if you have anything to say," demanded the man on horseback.

Westbrook fearlessly turned upon him with suddenness:

"Can't a stranger come into these mountains and pass up and down the highways as he may desire without giving an account of himself to everyone whom he may chance to meet? Why should my affairs concern you?"

"I am not troubling myself about your desires; but, stranger, you look mighty like a revenue officer. They are frequently busying themselves around here, but if we get onto it, they don't bother us very long, and unless you can give a pretty good excuse for being here, I guess you won't very much enjoy your stay with us."

"If it should interest you to know, my dear fellow, allow me to say that I am one of the club members, here on a little vacation. I have come to meddle with no one's affairs. All I shall ask of the citizens of this vicinity is to be let alone, and I can assure them that they will not be molested by me," retorted Westbrook pointedly.

"Oh, then you are the club-man, are you? I have heard of you already, and from what I can learn you are meddling with somebody's business; he won't stand for any more of it, either. I will not explain now, but you had better be on your guard, or you will find out what I mean if you are caught in these woods any more at a time like this," said Drexel as he shoved his revolver into its holster, gave his horse a spur on either side and galloped down the hill, saying to himself:

"I'll have to get him out of the way sooner or later—might as well have done it tonight to prevent him from making any more trouble for me."

This was the first of the many stormy meetings of the rivals for Angenette Clifton's hand.

Westbrook knew he had encountered one of the Bald Knobbers, and, while far from being a coward he knew that *it would be best to avoid him and*

his associates in the future, and especially not give them occasion to believe that he was an agent of the government, or any one likely to molest them in any way.

Drexel had called at the Clifton home that evening and, noting the change in Angenette's manner, which lacked its usual cordiality and cheerfulness, compelled her to tell him the cause of her strange actions and her coolness of manner. Her answer was indefinite and unsatisfactory, but she finally told of meeting a stranger who assisted her when she and Cricket had an accident. There was nothing in her words to betray her inward feelings as she told of the incident, but Drexel was keen of perception, even if he was not college bred; so he divined the secret of it all, especially when he seized the card bearing Westbrook's address, which fell from Angenette's belt, where she had placed it for safe keeping when he gave it to her. A tussle ensued for the possession of the card, but notwithstanding the fact that Angenette was as strong and active as most men she could not hold her own with the sturdy mountaineer.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Why should that concern you?" she replied simply.

"You have been playing the coquette with some of those government rascals who have been prying around here after moonshiners or something else that don't concern them, and I suppose he has been filling your head with a lot of trashy ideas that you ought to know enough not to believe."

Angenette's inborn independence of character asserted itself. She had half a mind to end their engagement then and there, to dismiss Drexel and tell him not to come to her home again. But she decided that it were better to wait and not stir up his anger, for she almost feared him at times, when his brute nature manifested itself.

They had lived in the same community almost all their lives and had been much together from childhood, but Angenette had recently begun to realize that Drexel was not her equal; there was something lacking which she could not clearly define, but her finer qualities, her higher ideals and family traditions seemed to remove her far from his rudeness, his commonplace ideas and his lack of true gallantry, which seemed to her, at times, to place an impassable barrier between them. While hers was a nature that must have something upon which to lavish its affection, fickleness and inconstancy had no part in her makeup. She knew that she had never really loved and that when the time should come her love would be centered unswervingly upon one object.

The question of the available is the true answer to many problems of marriage. It is not always the case that women marry those whom they desire the most to possess, and sometimes they do not lavish their love upon the real object of their choice, but upon the person who presents himself as a candidate claiming the right to their affections at the proper time. They sometimes argue that there is nothing left to do but to take the next best, and that is the

reason that many a young girl, especially those who are compelled to spend their lives in the rural districts, try to force themselves to love some wooer when there is none better to claim their hand, and no cunning rival to thwart them.

Although Wade Drexel had seen more of the outside world and used better language than most of his fellow mountaineers, appearing in many ways better than they, Angenette knew that he fell far short of being her ideal, and knowing that she could not tolerate any one for a husband who in the slightest degree failed to measure up to her ideal, regarding a second choice as utterly unthinkable, she had already decided it would be impossible to carry out her vow to become his wife, which she now looked upon as a foolish and irresponsible act of childhood.

"I will go through life unwed before I will make such a sacrifice of my principles," she said seriously.

CHAPTER III

A LEGACY REJECTED

“.....And I hereby further give and bequeath unto one, Bernard Westbrook, a resident of the city of St. Louis, Missouri, a certain property, the Arklow Block, with the land thereunto pertaining, and hereinafter more particularly described, and all personal property of whatsoever kind thereunto belonging and attached thereto, the said realty lying at the intersection of Westport avenue and Fourth street, upon this condition, honestly performed :

“That said Bernard Westbrook shall become the husband of my niece, Cornelia Burwell, at whatever time the parties of each part shall mutually agree upon signing the marriage contract. Should he, the said Bernard Westbrook, fail to comply with this provision, said property shall revert to my general estate and become, without reservation and without necessity for any process of law, the property absolutely of St. Aubin’s Academy, situate in the city of St. Louis.”

This was the surprising information which came through the medium of a letter from the law firm of Dyson & Morrow, of St. Louis, to Bernard Westbrook, the letter further stating that they had been made executors of the estate of the late Lewis Bur-

well, for many years a well-known business and club-man of that city. He had long been interested in the young attorney who was so favored in his last testament, believing that he was a young man with a bright future if he received the proper encouragement and carefully directed his energies; Burwell also knew of his niece's professed infatuation for Westbrook, and having no immediate relatives whom he cared to have inherit all his property, he voluntarily made this provision in his will which had just been filed for probate.

"Most men in my position might consider this indeed good fortune, but I am afraid it has come too late, and, under the circumstances, it will be necessary for me to decline it," was Westbrook's only comment as he quietly folded the copy of the original document, carelessly threw it to one side, and began examining the rest of his mail. He was alone in his accustomed seat on the back porch of the club-house where he usually sat and smoked immediately after he had breakfasted, which on this occasion was somewhat later than usual.

It was always his custom to decide questions, even of the gravest import, on the spur of the moment, seldom pondering any subject a very great length of time. He believed that his first conclusions, based on any premise, were always the best and should be acted upon instead of the later unsound fragments that came in their train, consequently his prompt decision to reject at once the provision of Lewis Burwell's will would not likely be changed. Had he been advised a week earlier

of the old gentleman's kindness, he would have, in all probability, given it a very serious consideration, if he had not accepted it readily. But things had taken quite an unexpected turn within the past fortnight, which would alter his entire subsequent career. He had just had a serious quarrel with Cornelia, which it now seemed utterly impossible to settle; besides a new life had come into his, which he believed might be destined to very materially influence his future. So, reaching for his fountain-pen and a sheet of note paper, he addressed to the firm of attorneys that had notified him of the provision of the Burwell will, a brief, hasty letter which read:

"Wessex Club-House,
"Cross Timbers, Mo.,
"May 6, 1886.

"Dyson & Morrow, Esqs.,
"St. Louis, Mo.

"Gentlemen:—

"Replying to your favor of the third instant, advising me of the fact that I have been made beneficiary of the will of the late Lewis Burwell, I beg to say that the same is not acceptable to me, and you may proceed to carry out the second provision contained therein.

"Thanking you for your kindness, I beg to remain,

"Yours very truly,
"BERNARD WESTBROOK."

"I may be doing a foolish thing that will perhaps give me cause for regret in the future, for it is not an easy task to get possession of property whose value is upwards of a million dollars. It is a proposition worth considering and one that but few would fail to accept from a purely business viewpoint, laying the question of sentiment aside entirely; but, fortunately or unfortunately, mine is a different nature, and I could get no enjoyment out of owning the property in question unless my attitude toward Cornelia should undergo a decided change, which is hardly probable. She has wronged me wantonly and without provocation, so far as I am able to determine, and I am sure we could not now be happy together," Westbrook thought as he began perusing another letter.

The family of this strangely constituted young attorney had formerly been distinguished and people of wealth, but misfortune had followed the Westbrooks in the wake of the war between the states. The father, a scion of the old aristocracy that harked back to the days of colonial Virginia, had managed immense plantations and various business enterprises that had gone down in the wreck of the South and were irretrievably lost in its ruins. He had sincerely regretted his inability to regain his lost prestige in the business and social world, principally because he felt that he would be unable to leave Bernard, his only son, the heritage deserved, and which he had hoped he would be able to give. Having always been of a practical turn of mind and regarding business success as the greatest of all earth-

ly successes, his declining age was saddened as the result of his lost fortunes, and he had hoped for an alliance of his house with that of the Burwells through his son. But the latter, while inheriting many of the sterling traits of his picturesque father, was more of the esthetic than the business type. However, he had been a success in his business affairs, scorning the bohemian life of his earlier companions, but he held money-getting as subservient to much else in life, and his ideals were higher and nobler than those of the average man of affairs of the present day metropolis.

"I will neither acquaint my own family nor Cornelia of my decision regarding the old gentleman's will, and maybe they will not learn of it, thereby saving explanations and other unpleasant results," remarked Westbrook as he sealed the letters he had just finished writing and ordered a club-house servant to bring his horse around preparatory to his accustomed daily ride to the post-office down the river.

As he rode through the woods along the winding bottom road, he could not prevent his thoughts from dwelling upon the unusual and unexpected provision in the will, but the more he turned the matter over in his mind the more fully determined he was to ignore it utterly.

CHAPTER IV

HEARD AT THE CROSS-ROADS STORE

Old Eph Hubb's store at the cross-roads on Panther Ridge was the favorite gathering place of the mountaineers who frequently assembled there from the vicinity of Iron Knob, Gobbler Bald, Buzzard Ridge, Beaver Creek and the intervening districts, especially on rainy days and Saturday afternoons. The dogs usually outnumbered the men. They fearlessly stretched themselves along the floor of the little store, often so many at a time that a customer could hardly move about. Some quarreled and fought on the outside or blockaded the road in front of the store. There were hounds, some with bobbed tails, curs and shepherds of low degree.

Ezra Dobbins, long-faced, with cheeks like a shriveled, frost-bitten persimmon, small gray eyes, a touseled head of dirty white hair like the ends of a raveled rope, a piping voice, an excitable yet harmless creature, was the oracle, the newsbearer of this community, far remote from the smokestacks of any metropolis. He was always informed on the latest gossip in the rural district in which he lived, and he would impart it to whomsoever he chanced to meet at the cross-roads store. He could be depended on to tell all about what his neighbors were doing, and he was pleased to allude to himself as

one of the best historians in all the Ozarks. As soon as he entered the store he was sure to be asked:

"Well, Uncle Ezra, what's the news today?"

Ezra would then seat himself on a box of potatoes or perch upon a sugar-barrel, knock the ashes from his cob-pipe on the heel of his boot, "duck" his head and spit across the room at the box of sawdust and begin:

"Waal, ez the feller sez, I dunno ez I hev anything wuth dividin', howsoever, I reckon yo' dun know 'bout Jabe Hook's darter cumin' back a hero?"

"I thought she went to the city to hire out as cook."

"Waal, she quit cookin' an' j'ined the army."

"Who ever heerd of a woman in a army?"

"Thet's jest whut she did, anyway,—went clean to some furrin kentry ez a Red Cross nu's', an' when she arriv' on the stage-coach over beyant the Yoakum Ridges, all the fellers wuz lined up to greet her ez a real hero; she had four propozials while waitin' fur the ole man to drive around with the wagon to take her home."

"Never had no propozials afore she j'ined the army," Ike Potts hazarded.

"Naw, not thet I know of, but when a feller sees a real female hero, he jest sorto' feels lak she'd be more pertection to him than a ordinary woman."

"They's been a-spreadin' on over to Jim Swadlow's o' late. Jim fetched home from the train t'other day a brand new organ."

"Didn't know about it."

"Yes, ye know *his* leetle darter, Dolly, allus wuz a *nateral musicianer*—could play a corn-stalk fiddle

when she's only a leetle tot, an' she could play any common chune on a coarse comb. On the new organ she plays a chune with one hand and another chune with her other hand, an' then one with each foot an' sings a different one at the same time."

"I s'pose you'ns sawn ole Mrs. Huggins wearin' a bran new 'fine-bunnet' an' a green, shiny dress at meetin' las' Sunday? Got it with the money Lem Huggins got fer gittin' his leg cut off by them pesky cars a couple o' y'ars ago when he went to the city as a guv'munt witness in the rev'noo case. I reckon she thinks it a ill wind thet blows nobuddy good. She's allus wanted a green, shiny dress, an' I reckon she never would a got it if them cars hadn't tooken pity on her and helped her out a leetle.

"Waal, bein's it looks lak it mout rain a'ter a bit, guess I'd better mosey back t'wards the cabin. All o' you'ns drap over occasionally. Sorry I don't know no news ter tell yo' today," concluded Ezra as he shuffled out at the door.

But the exchange of news items did not cease when Uncle Ezra left the store.

"By juckies, lemme tell whut I seen over to Sid Horner's t'other day," exclaimed Al Arp as he threw down his hat and jumped on it.

"What happened at Sid's?"

Al reached for a splinter on a goods-box, gave his long jack-knife a few whets across the bottom of his boot, then began to whittle. He would never tell a story or answer a question until he had found a suitable piece of wood and began whittling.

"Sid had been away frum home two days, per-tendin' thet he wuz out buyin' houghs, some more o'

them sandy colored hazel-splitters; but the fact is he never looked fer no houns—went straight to Yank Doty's distillery up in Wild Cat Holler, like he allers does when his jug gits empty! been doin' the same trick fer y'ars, 'specially when spring cums, when he sez he has to make him some bitters to rile up his blood a bit afore he kin do his plantin'. Sid had tooken a leetle too much o' his ile o' joy on the way home, cons'quent' he walked sort o' wabbly, like a young calf, when he got off his old switched-tailed mare and started with the jug to his cabin. His ole woman, Esmeraldy, met him at the gate an' sez, sez she:

" 'Sid Horner, I's got a big surprise waitin' fer ye, ondoubtedly one that will fill yer soul with bliss to the b'ilin' over p'int.' "

" 'Whut mout hit be—knit me a new pair o' red yarn socks?' "

" 'Nope.' "

" 'Found the monkey-wrench thet wuz lost las' fall, I reckon?' "

" 'Nuthin' like thet.' "

" 'Then whut the tarnashun has happened—the old yaller cat that ran off showed up?' "

" 'Missed hit ag'in—all yer mothers-in-law air waitin' inside the house ter see yer—they've cum ter spend a long while visitin' ye.' "

" 'I ain't tol' no more lies, ner cussed no more, ner had no more fouts lately than usual,' said Sid a'ter he had ketched his breath, 'Why is it th' Almighty wants to heap sich unbearable punishmint on top o' me all to onct by sendin' them pesky varmints

into my cabin to eat up more meal an' bacon than I kin git a'ter workin' all summer? I'm a notion to go down to the crick an' git some buckeyes an' pizen myself ter death like the ole brindle cow thet got tired o' bein' dogged out of the corn las' summer an' et buckeyes an' died, an' be in glory an' peace like her,' Sid said.

" 'Now, Sid Horner, you jest stop any sich talk ez that, or'ter be ashamed of yo'self fer any sich carryings-on—go right into the house; they've all got their mouths primped up fer yo' ter kiss 'em. G'long an' do yer dooty.'

" 'Dooty be dodrotted—I'd ruther go up to the woods-pastur' an' kiss Lafe Johnson's old sheep—I won't nigh go 'bout 'em,' Sid wuz sayin' when out rushed the four mothers-in-law,—ye know Sid has been married four times,—an' them ole wimmin surrounded him. Sid tuk to the woods, but ez he started to climb the fence the longest, slimmest of the wimmin who could outrun t'others cotched him by the shirt collar and yanked him down jist in time fer the oldest one of the wimmin, who is as big as a houghshead, stumbled over a bar'l hoop an' fell on top o' him. Sid thought they wuz tryin' ter kill 'im, and he begged fer mercy, promisin' ter let 'em live with him always if they'd spare his life. While he wuz on his knees prayin' to the Almighty to deliver him from sich a pestilence, the four mothers-in-law j'ined hands an' played 'ring-erround-rosey' with Sid in the middle.

" 'A'ter they had tuk Sid into the house whar he sot quietly weepin' in the corner, them wimmin got

into the all firedist row ye ever hearn tell uv, callin' each other wuss names than the Buzzard Ridge boys used the night they had the fuss with the gang from 'Possum Trot Holler at the log-rollin'. Sid's five dogs got scart purt nigh ter death an' cum a-yelpin' through the winders. Next I seed Sid jump out at the door holdin' his leetle twin brats under his arms, makin' fer the storm-cellar an' shouten' to Esmeraldy to save herself an' the jug o' whisky.

"You'd a-thought that the hull gang o' Bald Knobbers wuz on one o' their jamborees in that cabin if you'd heerd that racket—louder than a harry-cane an' wuss than the roar of a dozen threshin' machines all to onct. Fin'ly hit ended out in the yarrud, an' all them ole wimmin went away limpin' an' 'lowin' they'd never cum to Sid Horner's house ag'in. But Sid wuz afeerd to poke his head out at the door of his storm-cellar fer three hours. Hit were a pow'ful fuss.

"That fout wuz in answer to my pray'r to the Almighty fer help. He had to git 'em into a fuss to git 'em away,' said Sid when he cum out an' seed that they wuz gorne, addin' ez he begun pickin' up broken pieces of chairs, trundle-beds an' skillets an' the like, 'I allus wuz a b'liever in the mercy o' th' Almighty'."

"That reminds me of when I fit the Mexicans back in the fo'ties," began old Eph Hubb, stroking his long gray beard, but his reminiscences of war times had been told so often that no one would listen to him.

"Didn't see any you fellers over to Sloan's ford on Bee Crick las' Sunday at the baptizin'," interrupted Si Skidds as he unanchored a half plug of Battle-Axe tobacco from his right jaw, pushed his weather-beaten rabbit-hair hat farther back on the left side of his head, twirled his long black mustache, folded his arms and settled back against a show-case to begin giving an account of the affair, which was of little concern to the gang that constituted his audience unless there was to be recounted a story of the test of physical strength in some way or the details given of a few amusing incidents growing out of it.

"Did anything happen wuth mentionin'? Any shootin' or ary fight?" inquired Buck Amick.

"Nary a fout ner a gun play," answered Si.

"Wouldn't a-keerd to bin thar, then," ejaculated Red Doak.

"Cum prit' nigh bein' a teetotal failure up to the last ones that wuz soused under—not even a dog-fout," resumed Si solemnly, "but the fun commenced when Parson Gaddy tackled Gran'pa Shinn who said he had been a turrible sinner fer eighty y'ar, but wuz now a sorrowfuller critter than his ole dog when he had killed a sheep an' got ketched, an' the ole man said he wanted to be ducked under the worter and start all over ag'in. Waal, the parson, who had been cheated in swappin' hosses with Gran'pa Shinn, sized the ole man up fer a minute an' then he sez, sez he:

"'Lookee yere, ole man, do ye think ye kin git to the glory-land jest by bein' baptized? 'Pears

to me like ye'd better swap hosses back with me, and git up in some meetin' an' tell the people how sorry ye air fer yo'r cheatin', lyin' and other mischief afore ye cum to be baptized.'

"Don't give a durn whuther ye baptize me er not, ye bald-headed, hawk-nosed, bow-legged scal-lawag,' said Gran'pa Shinn ez he raised his home-made hickory walkin'-stick to take the parson a whack over the head, but Parson Gaddy jumped out the way an' the old man plunged into the crick. He cum up splashin' the worter like a drowndin' mule. Then he clim out on the bank an' shuck hisself like a wet dog, fer the spring rains had made Bee Crick muddy and cold. He 'lowed that wuz baptizin' enough fer him until summer time, anyway. 'Reck-on hit'll do me ez much good ez the ginuine, anyhow,' sez he.

"Jest ez the parson went to dip ole Mrs. Bates under, a deck of playin' keerds that some boys up the crick had throwed onto the worter cum a-floatin' down whar the parson wuz baptizin'. He grabbed up a fine han' of aces, jacks, an' ten spots and looked like he wanted to banter somebuddy fer a game, but ole Mrs. Bates slid down the muddy bank ferninst the parson an' reminded him that he wuz not in any poker game; ye know the ole woman weighs nigh onto two hundred pounds and Parson Gaddy is a little skinny feller. When she slid down onto him like launchin' a boat she liked to onbalanced him, an' in rightin' hisself he throwed up his han' an' struck her a biff in the jaw. She turned round an' wuz about to pitch into him, fact she did jab him a

hard upper cut in the ribs, but he 'pologized an' explained how hit happened. But when he soused her under she wuz too much fer him an' pulled him off the rock he wuz standin' on into the deep worter. Ye never see sich splashin' an' pawin' ner ever heerd sich hollerin' frum the gang o' youngsters, who had clim the trees to see the baptizin'. I reckon they'd a'drowned ef some of the fellers hadn't pulled 'em out, jest ez a big limb broke on a sycamore tree that hung out over the crick on which a passel o' boys had clim. Hit throwed them all into the crick. That skeer'd a half dozen teams hitched clus by and they broke loose and ran away, tearin' up a few wagons an' causin' all sorts o' trouble. I tell ye hit wuz wuth seein', more 'citement than I'd sawn fer a month."

"Wisht I'd a bin thar," exclaimed several of Si's hearers in unison.

"Ort to; a feller never knows how much fun is likely to come out uv a 'casion like that," concluded Si as he proceeded to bite on a new plug of tobacco as if he had been eating from a piece of cheese.

"Ist, whut ye got them dratted pieces o' rocks on the brim o' yer hat an' on yer ole jeans coat fer?" asked Jeems Henry Pigg of Uncle Bill Davis. The latter believed himself to be a naturalist and he spent a great deal of time overturning stones along the banks of creeks and digging holes along the ridges, prospecting for traces of ore. He believed that the region abounded in all kinds of mineral and precious stones, always hoping to find a valuable specimen that would make him rich; and from time to time he

sent pieces of rock to some assay office to have it "antitized," as he would say. The analysis would invariably show that no mineral was present, but Uncle Bill was never discouraged and kept on searching.

"Them's as fine specimints of mintrel as ye ever sot yo'r optics on, Jeems Henry Pigg," said Uncle Bill in answer to his question. "Them's plenty good to be worn in the crown of ary king in Yarrup—think I've been in the mintrel business sixty y'ars fer nuthin'? W'y, jest t'other day I found down on the crick a yaller diamint as big as a double goose-egg. You wait till I grind hit down on the grind-stone an' you'll see a gem so sparklin' thet you'll think hit's one o' th' planets a'risin.'"

"Whut air th' planets, Oncle Bill?" enquired Tom Cunningham.

"You a school teacher an' don't know what a planet is? W'y, I'm s'prised at yo'r ignorance. The planets air the moon and the seben stars—think you don't know much," replied Uncle Bill, adding: "They control all the weather; if they cum in clus proximity, hit's shore to rain, hail, sleet er snow afore tomorry night."

"Speakin' 'bout hail reminds me o' when I fit the Mexicans back in the fo'ties—" began old Eph Hubb, but at this juncture in the conversation, Jeems Henry Pigg jumped for the door, kicking a hole in a tin coffee can with his big spur and yelled: "Dog-fight, by crimminy!"

The gang followed him out at the door, for they knew that excitement or fun of some kind was

always to be found wherever he went. The dog fight failed to take place, but the crowd of spectators and loafers reached the road in time to see an exciting race between a man and a woman who were on horses that seemed to be beyond control. The crowd did not understand whether it was an elopement, a run-away or what the excitement was about, and in order to see the finish and ascertain the cause, some of the gang, among whom were a few Bald Knobbers, mounted their horses and followed.

CHAPTER V

THE TEST OF A HERO

Whether the capabilities for great good or great evil, which underlie the exterior of every man, come to the surface to give the world a chance to fathom his nature, depends upon opportunity and environment. The attributes of passion, tenderness, cowardice or bravery may lie dormant, unused and unknown until the crucial test comes to call them forth, and it is seldom that one can be judged rightly unless some unexpected situation arises requiring tact and shrewdness, as well as quick judgment and prompt decision,—in fine, to show one's colors.

Angenette Clifton admired most of all that attribute, which, in fact, all women like in men better than any other quality—power—the ability and the will to do something extraordinary. She detested a weakling, a coward or a low scale of mentality. It was the unusual prowess and physical endurance of Wade Drexel that she admired; of his many other shortcomings she was well aware, notwithstanding the fact that she had never had an opportunity to compare him with a man of superior attainments; but her rare natural talent, her wonderful receptive capacity and her highly developed perceptive faculties, enabled her to penetrate to the depth of things with remarkable accuracy, which

frequently saved her from embarrassing mistakes and unpleasant and dangerous situations. Being quick to see her opportunity, she rarely failed to grasp it, realizing that the present is always the best time to do whatever presents itself as necessary to be done. She never reasoned that another day is another chance—it was today or never with her.

Upon this occasion came the opportunity, unexpectedly and accidentally, to test the sterling qualities of Bernard Westbrook. When Angenette Clifton rode out toward Iron Knob, lured by the sunshine beneath which the old farm lay basking, there was not yet warmth enough in the air to bring thoughts of indolence, which, indeed, never visited Angenette. The odor of belated apple blossoms was in the breeze that came gently from the orchard. All along Beaver Creek bottom the hedge rows were leafing; here and there a red-haw bush, arrayed in white blooms, stood out in bold relief against the more somber background of colors on the hillside beyond. Overtopping the box-alders and half-leaved dwarf-willows, the dogwood stood, like a sentinel ghost. The birds, too, were back from the South. The robin and the brown thrush sang in the old crab tree and flew here and there quarreling with the blue jays and sparrows for the right to preempt the choicest nesting places. The swallows, in all their recklessness, were on the wing. Angenette caught something of the new life and good cheer of everything around her.

She had taken more pains with her toilet than ever before when preparing for a ride, being careful

that her hair was arranged in a manner most becoming to her, and that her hat was properly placed, somewhat saucily tilted to one side. All the buckles and brass nail-heads on her bridle and saddle had been carefully polished and a new buckskin "cracker" had replaced the old one at the end of her quirt.

She rode down the valley through which Beaver Creek dashed, still muddy from the recent rains. Although the roads were again dry even in the low lands, where frequent travel had worn them smooth, here and there stood little pools of water. Always before Cricket was permitted to follow his own inclination and "fox-trot" right through them if he so desired, but now he was carefully guided around each one so that no mud would be splashed upon the rider's skirts. If this unusual care was the result of the thought that she might by accident meet the stranger she had seen a few days before she need not have taken any extraordinary pains, for she did not know that she would be most admired for her simplicity, plainness of dress and unaffected manner of speech, by the man who had grown tired of the stilted formality and the precise speech of cultured society.

Westbrook had ridden every day over the ridges and through the valleys in that vicinity since their first meeting, but he had seen nothing of Angenette.

Neither the thoughts of his meeting with Wade Drexel nor his threat disturbed him, for he was not afraid of Drexel nor, in fact, the whole company of Bald Knobbers, neither did

the consciousness of the loss of business, the anxiety of clients nor the thought that Cornelia Burwell might be receiving the attentions of other men, which he knew she had been doing, disturb him. He merely wrote to them that he was taking a complete rest, not intimating a fact which he considered rather foolish to admit to himself, that a young girl who, with all of her simplicity, gave evidence of the presence of noble blood, had wrought a change in him.

Wade Drexel also felt a strange restlessness that he could not explain. He knew instinctively that the girl he loved was slipping away from him; he could not tell why. Maybe it was because she had come to realize what he himself had become aware of some time ago, the utter incongeniality of their natures, of her superiority and his lack of the finer qualities, which, after all, go to make up a man in the truest sense; then he argued that she might overlook his failings were it not for the influence of Westbrook. At thought of him and the strong probability of his being the real cause of his trouble, Drexel's fighting blood rose and he resolved to get the club-man out of the way in some manner. He was quick both in laying and executing his plans. Knowing that his rival was at that time riding, he decided to lure him off of the main road and have his quarrel out with him, but before this plan could be put in operation, a strange thing happened, which nearly resulted in disaster for Angenette and Westbrook and

which proved the latter to be a hero and Drexel a coward.

After riding for more than an hour, Angenette turned her pony down the road that winds like a tortuous passage along the bluff on the western slope of Panther Ridge, through the valley of Beaver Creek and past the old water-mill, now falling to decay. She turned aside in a dim wood-path that led across the hill into the main road again, in order to shorten the way. Cricket pricked up his ears and acted queerly. Just then there was a crashing of branches overhead not ten yards away. Quickly turning, the girl saw a tawny brown streak dart through the boughs; then she heard a piteous bleat, and all was still again. It was the deadly spring of a panther on his victim—a young lamb that had wandered too close under the tree in which his enemy was lying in wait. Cricket was badly frightened and went bounding down the path and into the road at a swift gallop.

Westbrook came into the valley road from an old trail which led down from Alki Bald. Although he was not far behind Angenette, he was not sure who she was, but he believed that she needed assistance whoever she might be, for he thought that her pony was evidently running away, consequently he put spurs to his horse and followed, overtaking the girl after a half mile run.

Cricket's ancestors were racing stock, and it was not his custom to willingly allow another

horse to pass him, so he bounded forward in his fright even at greater speed and kept a short distance ahead.

"Don't be frightened; hold tight—I'll stop your pony," shouted Westbrook as he reached out his hand in an effort to seize Cricket's bridle rein. Although apparently calm, he was unable to conceal an anxious look.

"I must have help or I'll surely be thrown," Angenette said nervously.

Cricket plunged on madly as his rider tightened her grip on the reins, drawing them taut on either side of the pony's neck. She threw away her riding-whip and tried to prevent her little sharp spur from touching Cricket's flank. They dashed into a pool that stretched entirely across the road, and the muddy water splashed in their faces. Westbrook thought nothing of his opportunity to prove himself a hero. The fact that a woman, no matter who, was in danger made him reckless of consequences, and, tightening up on his bridle reins and urging his young sorrel to full speed, he managed to clutch the bridle rein that Angenette had been compelled to drop, using both hands in holding herself in place in the saddle, which she felt was turning. Westbrook was exhausting his own strength much faster than that of the little black pony which seemed now to be absolutely unmanageable.

A half-dozen hounds, aroused by the clattering hoof-beats, dashed out from under a log cabin and ran after the horses for some distance,

yelping furiously. They did not give up the chase until the little store at the cross-roads was reached. Old Eph Hubb, realizing the predicament of the couple, forgot his wooden leg and ran into the road frantically waving his hands in an effort to stop the horses, at the same time shouting to a number of dirty, tow-headed urchins playing in the road:

"Look out thar! ye dratted ignoramuses."

His warning was just in time to save them from being trampled by the running horses that continued recklessly on down the hill toward White River.

Wade Drexel, who was with the gang at the store, where he had just arrived, seeing that the woman was Angenette, hastened to mount his horse and follow them. He could not imagine what it all meant. The man must be trying to kidnap her. Then he thought of the St. Louis club-man, and drew his forty-one caliber Colt's revolver and tried to get a bead on him, but a sharp turn in the road prevented this, for Westbrook was soon out of range, and by the time Drexel's horse had rounded the brow of the hill, he had decided to first ascertain what the matter was.

The river was now only a quarter of a mile away and the crossing was deep. Angenette did not know what might happen if the horses should plunge into the swollen stream. At least she and her companion would be wet to the skin,

but while she was trying to decide what, if anything, could be done to prevent a catastrophe, fearing that there was no way of escape, Westbrook caught the glimmer of the fly-wheel of a traction engine and saw a little puff of white smoke through the narrow neck of woods around which the road turned sharply just a few yards from the river. Continuous travel and heavy rains had cut the road through the soft silt several feet below the level of the ground on either side so that the narrow passage would not accommodate more than two horses abreast. This space was almost completely filled by the engine.

"It's either stop this pony immediately or death," Westbrook said under his breath as he threw himself off his horse, clutching Cricket by the nose and the bridle bit, checking his speed just in time to save the pony from plunging square against the engine which was climbing the slippery bank.

In preventing Angenette and Cricket from dashing against the engine, Westbrook collided with it and was slightly stunned. The big sorrel, which had become badly frightened in the course of the race, made a desperate leap up the bank and ran through the woods in the direction of the club-house.

Angenette, fearing that Westbrook was hurt, flushed and then paled, but upon learning of his escape from injury she laughed and sobbed in turn as she felt a peculiar weakness creeping *over her*. She recalled his words to her, the

first she had ever heard him utter, and repeated them to him:

"Are you hurt? May I assist you?" He brushed away the drying bits of mud from his face and soon gave assurance that he had recovered. When he had helped the girl to mount her pony he began looking for his own horse. In the confusion he had not noticed but that the animal had stopped and was standing near by. When shown the direction the horse had taken, he started to recover the animal, intending to return and continue his journey with Angenette.

Just then Wade Drexel arrived upon the scene. His air was somewhat defiant, that of the braggadocio, and tilting his big hat on the back of his head, he drew up the bridle reins and demanded in a gruff voice:

"Who's causing all this trouble here?"

But Angenette did not seem to hear, for she was thinking of the man who had risked his life in an honest effort to save hers. "What more could any one do to prove his mettle?" she said to herself.

Drexel, who had been in a humor to raise a row ever since the night of his first meeting with Westbrook, secretly hoped that she would point to the mud-bespattered man standing in the road, indicating that he was the one responsible for the unpleasant situation.

"No matter from what it may have started, that fellow would have stopped your pony, if he had any sand in him, without it being necessary to *run into an engine*," said Drexel.

"You never mind about the sand—don't let that worry you," the girl replied curtly.

Seeing that he was only making matters worse for himself by his disparaging remarks reflecting on the prowess of his rival, Drexel said no more. Although his lips framed a curse, he held his temper in leash, and when occasion permitted, he gave Westbrook a wicked look, but the latter was too well-bred to give any evidence of noticing it and he refrained from replying to Drexel in the presence of Angenette. He was at a loss to know what to do. He did not take kindly to the idea of leaving her with the ruffian who would evidently place him in a bad light before her, if possible, but there seemed no alternative. He had no horse and it was many miles back to the club-house. It was growing late; the shadows of evening had already begun to gather and darkness would soon be upon the valley. He must find his horse at once or spend the night in the woods.

"I will not go away like a coward and leave her here with that fellow, no matter how greatly it will inconvenience me," he concluded.

"Why could you not lend him some assistance; either go yourself or allow him to take your horse until he finds his own?" were Angenette's words to Drexel. But he did not deign to answer, pretending not to hear as he watched the engine climb the slippery road until lost to view. Finally he said:

"Well, it seems that we had better journey on toward home. I see no excuse for standing here; I've been wanting to see you, anyway. I am very glad you were not hurt."

Angenette had no intention of permitting him to accompany her home, for her former admiration—she could no longer think of it as love—for Drexel, was slowly growing into absolute distaste, but knowing the jealous nature of the man and believing that he loved her to the point of desperation, she feared to break with him or show her real feelings toward him. She would be compelled to devise some clever means of getting out of his power. How she was to do it was not yet clear to her.

"If I were to follow my own promptings in the matter I would tell him to go and would throw this engagement ring into the river," she said to herself.

But notwithstanding the fact that her impetuous nature at times prompted her to rashness, such feelings were always outweighed in the balance of reason and justice, and the right usually triumphed. She knew she did not dare treat him in this manner, but that her plans must be cleverly laid and carried out with adroitness, or failure alone would reward her, and thoughts of failing in any undertaking, especially of such vital import, made her shudder.

At this juncture Wilfred Clifton, Angenette's foster-father, was seen fording the river on his way home from his cattle ranch in the *Limestone Hills*. At his approach, Drexel sulkily

galloped back to the cross-roads store. The Cliftons rode home together after the old ranchman had offered his horse and his own services to Westbrook, who declined both, believing that he would soon recover his own horse unaided.

"I am sorry my services were of no more value to you, Miss Clifton, and I hope that the next time we meet it will be under more favorable circumstances," said Angenette's benefactor as he made a courtly bow and started through the woods.

CHAPTER VI

THE TREASURE CAVE

White River is full of a varied beauty in every winding sweep, when through the narrow defiles it hurries or loiters by some village nestled among the hills, or dashes at the base of a precipice of gray limestone, darkly frowning like the huge front of an ancient castle. With its name is associated the memory of many a daring deed; of each wild spot in its bold scenery a tale is told, some of which have been handed down to succeeding generations, but many dark deeds and acts of awe-inspiring bravery have died here unrecorded. How many heroes and heroines have passed from its shores, now unnoticed and unknown! Could the red clay, fragments of bones and rude pottery found in the Indian mounds on the Yoakum Ridges speak, what thrilling tales they might tell! For here roamed tribes of the Delawares, Chickasaws, Osages, Sacs and Foxes and near the juncture of Beaver Creek and White River was the favorite meeting place of the red men for generations, and there a trading post stood for many years. Was not the stillness of these long reaches of placid waters often broken by their canoes? and did its

silent banks not hear the love chant of many a warrior, or perchance, on evenings long past, the lament of an Indian maiden for her lost brave?

Then came the Spaniards, those dark soldiers of fortune and lovers of adventure. Could the ruins of the old Spanish town of Laverio speak, might not they tell tales as interesting as those which cluster around the romantic villages of ancient Andalusia where brave knights and gallant troubadours lived and loved?

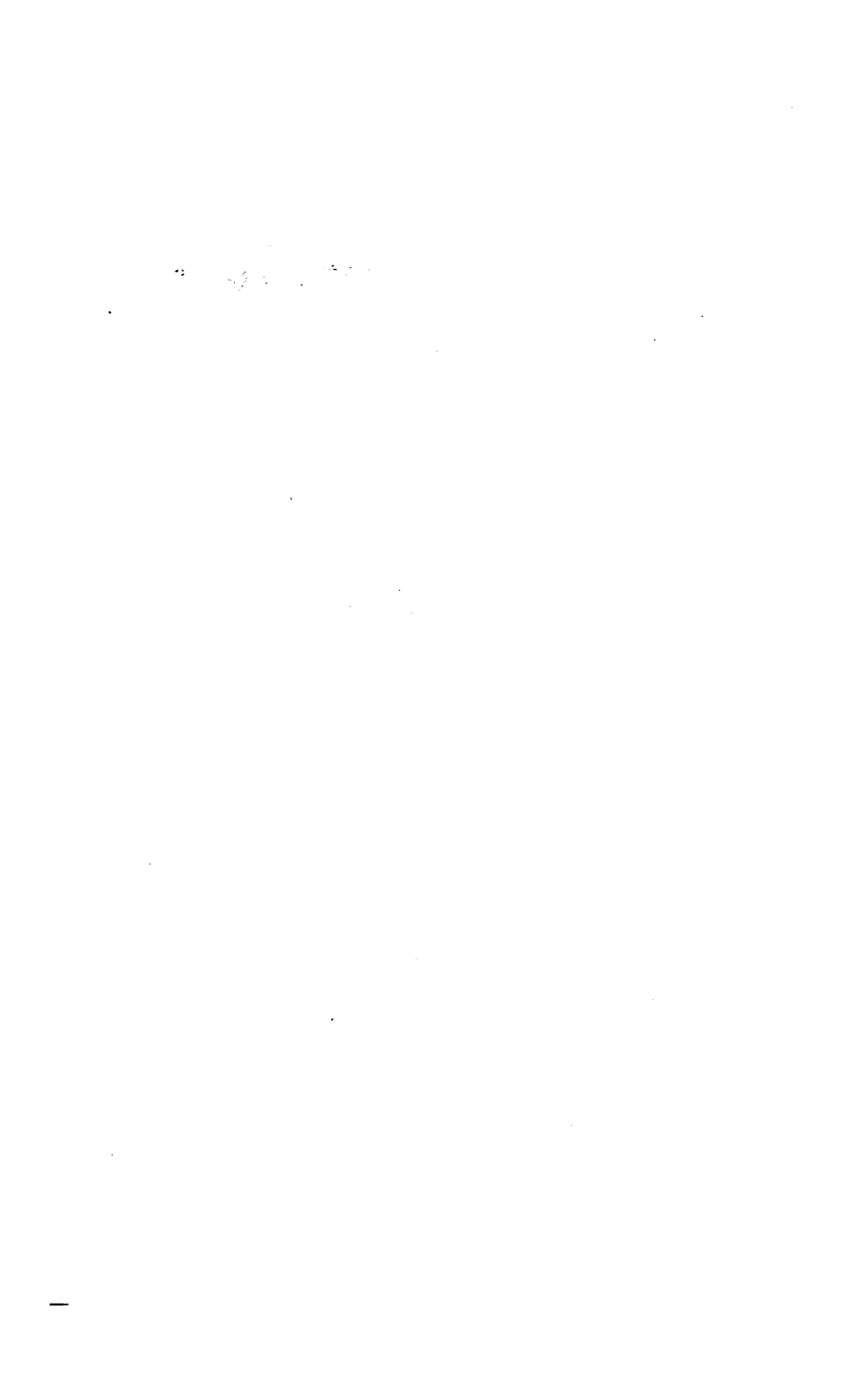
The Bald Knobbers were the last history-making characters in this region. They were a band not devoid of good principles, and their sterner qualities would have made them admired as heroes in any community, had their chivalric energies been directed into better channels.

It is not strange that such a rugged environment should produce such hardy and daring men, and it was quite natural that they should choose one of the knobs of their own Ozarks for their rendezvous; for the visitor to that particular section of this chain of mountains is at once impressed not only with its beauty and grandeur but with its bold ruggedness, which is not overwhelming, yet fascinating withal.

Two impressions of the valley are vivid at the first glance, and their life in the memory is due to their great contrast. One is of a level stretch of land of several miles ranging from a quarter of a mile to one mile in width, a floor which in the summer months is covered with flowers and grasses, amid which are scattered



"This pretty sylvan scene is made home-like by here and there a cabin—"



groups and groves of various species of oak, elm, hickory and pine; here and there a great sycamore lifts its athletic limbs above the lesser trees and shrubs of many varieties. This pretty sylvan scene is made home-like by here and there a cabin of rough hewn logs or a small white-washed hut. The soft tinkling of sheep bells is heard up and down the river and now and then the louder notes of the large bells worn by wandering cows. This quiet beauty that soothes the sight is in sharp contrast with the other impression. For, lifting the eyes, one beholds this stretch of pasture and grove to be surrounded by stupendous walls, reaching to cloud-like heights and carved along their sides and crests into such domes, spires and arches that the mind is unable to grasp its full magnificence in an instant. The great cliffs are varied in color and in form, yet they have such a similarity in their bold flights that they present to the eye symmetrical walls about the valley.

From the crevices in some of these high rocks, hardy oak trees lift their gnarled branches. Some of the highest peaks are covered with stunted trees, others are bald, whence their names. Sometimes an eagle, with immense wings spread, will be seen swooping down from his eyrie to the valley below. At times the air will palpitate with the lightning-like rush of the sparrow-hawk, while far overhead are slowly sailing in circles, on apparently moveless wings, large flocks of white-beaked buzzards.

The floor of the valley is usually quiet, save for here and there a rushing stream. In the spring-time it comes leaping down from the cliff-tops in many places and sometimes forms small waterfalls, but most of them, as the summer months advance, gradually diminish in volume until their course may be determined only by the perpendicular streak along the gray, smooth wall of limestone, now white but later fading into a yellow when all the moisture is gone.

It was in such a place that the great cave used by the Bald Knobbers for their rendezvous was located, high up on the slope of Alki Bald. The place was selected partly because it was centrally located, with reference to the vicinity where lived the members of this mysterious organization, and partly because roads, trails and sheep-paths led from this mountain in all directions, so that the Bald Knobbers could quickly scatter, if necessary, or could start direct on a trip to any locality without losing time unnecessarily; but it was selected mainly owing to the fact that the cave was the most suitable in the community for their purposes, being not only the largest but also the most difficult to find by strangers. Its location was made known to the Bald Knobbers through Seth Bark, one of the organizers and later a chief of the league, who located the cave in an interesting manner, as will be shown.

Hundreds of people living in the Ozarks in the vicinity of the old Spanish settlement, and

residents of other countries have diligently searched in caves and prospected in many places in the hope of finding some of the legendary wealth, believing in the traditions of lost Spanish and Indian treasures that haunt the Ozarks with such remarkable persistence.

The stories about the Spanish treasures in the Ozarks were told the first settlers who came to the White River country about the time Missouri entered the Union. The friendly Indians gave hints that the land was rich in precious ores and buried treasures. The French fur traders had heard about treasure caves in the Missouri mountains, and it was said, that once in a while a party of Spaniards from Mexico would make a mysterious visit to the country, stay a few weeks in the woods and leave with a load of something on a pack horse.

The burden was not venison hams; that could be attested by every hunter who saw the strangers departing for their destination, which was unknown to any one in the Ozarks.

As tradition would have it, this treasure cave is also rich in deposits of silver, which the Indians worked a century and a half or more ago and was first discovered by a Chickasaw hunter who was driven into the cavern by a storm. He found that the walls of the cave were a solid mass of silver. Subsequently large quantities of ore were melted in hollowed-out rocks and molded into large bars in molds made of stiff clay and stored away in the cave. Jewelry of various kinds

was made of the silver and carried to the nearest trading centers and traded for blankets and other necessities by the red men. Many of them were seen wearing silver ornaments plentifully and even had weapons which were tipped and decorated with this precious metal.

Fearing an attack by Spaniards from the southwest, all valuables of the tribe were placed in the cave and preparations made for a move to a new territory. The entrance to the cave was closed up with rock and dirt scraped from the mountain side and covered to a depth of several feet.

As it was the custom of the Chickasaws to mark every place of importance, peculiar marks of every description were cut on rocks and trees so they could easily find the cave when they returned. Leaving their White River hunting grounds with the intention of returning, the Indians started toward "the setting sun," and had gone only a short distance when they were attacked by a band of Spanish gold hunters and were driven back to their old hunting grounds, where all in possession of the secret of the location of the silver cave died of a fatal disease which swept the camp.

A hundred caves in southwestern Missouri have been explored by the credulous seekers of these Spanish and Indian treasures. Some of the fortune hunters have used the "divining rod," that mysterious wand whose occult power is supposed to draw its owner to hidden gold or silver.

The "parchment waybill" is another guide to the Spanish wealth in which many persons believe. The "waybill" is a map of the country around the cave. It describes the lay of the ground in the vicinity of the treasure, and all of the writing on the old paper is in Spanish. There are now but few of these "waybills" in their original form. Most of them have been translated into English.

At the first meeting held by the Bald Knobbers, which was at the home of Seth Bark, on the west skirts of Iron Knob, he suggested that the proper place for future meetings would be in a cave where their proceedings would not be interrupted, for it would be necessary to hold councils and even courts from time to time for the purpose of planning their work and trying traitors and others.

"I have the description of just the kind of a place we are looking for; there's money in the cave, too, but I have not been able to locate it. Will you help find it?" said Seth.

Members of the league agreed to devote the next few days in searching for the cave, with the understanding that the treasure should be divided among the entire number, in case it was discovered. Seth then read the following "waybill," which he said he had secured from a Spaniard, Jose Caroyzo, who had come from Delvorte, Mexico, for the purpose of seeking a buried treasure which he said had been hidden in a cave somewhere along White River by his ancestors:

"Take an old trail running north from the ancient site of Laverio on White River in the Ozark Mountains. Follow the trail about three miles until you come to a dim road running east and west. Go west on this road about one half of a mile and you will come to a mammoth spring and some big timber. There are two or three old cabins here. If you look carefully you will find some sinks or pits about five hundred paces southwest of the big spring which forms a little creek across which there is a bluff. About three hundred paces from the center of the bluff and down the creek a short distance there is another spring not so large as the first. Somewhere near the center of this bluff and fronting north on the creek is the main entrance to the cave. It was filled up and covered with a big flat rock and three turkey feet cut on the stone. About twelve or thirteen feet within the cave you will find the passage that descends about fifteen feet to the bottom of the cave. When you reach the bottom a passage will be found running nearly southeast. A little farther on you will come to a passage running southwest. This is a false passage about thirty feet in length cut to reach a deeper room coming under the creek. It was abandoned when the new entrance was made. The one you are to follow runs nearly south and dips down. This should be followed until you enter a large room fronting southeast. The treasure is stored in one wing of this room, which was used to work in. Bullion, Spanish

money and silver ore will be found there, also some tools which were left in the cave.

"My father and his brother took some of the money from there after the Spaniards left that country, but there is plenty remaining, enough for fifty men, and more in sight.

"If you cannot find the treasure by these directions, go down the little creek that runs near the old town site, following its course which leads southwest to the flat bottom where you will find a mineral spring, and just beyond the spring, about three hundred paces, there is another creek coming into the main stream. Northeast of the bluff is the cave. Just above the level of the bank of the creek where you leave the old trail running east and west are three big flat rocks. The rocks are marked with turkey feet. One rock has one, another two and the other three turkey feet cut on the north sides. The entrance to the cave is near these rocks in the center of the bluff."

Members of the new league worked assiduously for several days, following closely the directions contained in the document which Seth Bark had procured from the Spanish adventurer, who, it appears, had a better right to the treasure than any one else. Much excitement was manifested whenever a member of the searching party discovered the entrance to a new cave, but their hopes were invariably shattered, for most of the newly discovered caverns were small and revealed nothing except the dry bones of domestic

animals that had been the prey of some of the wild creatures that had their dens in the bluffs. Thoughts of a suitable place in which to hold their meetings were discarded—the lost treasure superseding all other thoughts. On the eighth day of the search Seth Bark himself discovered the entrance to the treasure cave. He had given up hope, and, being weary from the arduous toil necessary in clambering over the jagged rocks and steep mountain sides, had thrown himself prone upon the ground to rest. His eye wandered along the uneven wall of rock that towered above him, resplendent in the setting sun, which revealed a dark spot on the side of the bluff.

“I’ll try once more and then quit, for all efforts will doubtless be barren of results,” he thought.

Although the searchers had all taken an oath to announce the finding of the cave to the rest of the party, Seth was endeavoring to evolve a plan to prevent his secret becoming generally known and to appropriate the treasure to himself. But other members of the party came along just as he was entering the cave, which was not a difficult feat after he had rolled away the large flat rock which had been so placed that it would completely cover the entrance to the subterranean passage, but it had settled into a foot of earth, thereby revealing a large aperture at the top of the entrance.

Before they had gone very far inside, the *men knew* from the description they had read

that this was the cave they were seeking and, aided by the light from their lanterns, they soon penetrated its recesses, although they came near missing the last passage to the room where the main treasure was stored.

Everything in the cave was dry and had been perfectly preserved although the treasure must have remained there for upwards of two hundred years. Just what it really amounted to, gauged by the currency of the United States, no one ever knew, for this remained one of the secrets of the organization which no member would ever divulge to any one outside of the league or even to new members who came into it at a later date. It would have made a few persons immensely rich. The amount that each member received was probably not large, yet it was noticed that many of them seemed to have much money after they had the gold restamped. Old mortgages were paid off and notes and outstanding accounts at stores and water-mills throughout the country were settled, and there was also much trading. The value of the silver ore was not fully appreciated by them, it seems, and but little attention was given it at the time.

If the somber walls of this lone cavern on Alki Bald could speak, what interesting stories they could tell! Many of the dark plots of the Bald Knobbers were formulated there which

were later published to the world, and some of those who took solemn oath that their lips would be forever sealed regarding the secrets growing out of their councils, long afterwards narrated their proceedings in the ears of the public.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT IN WILD CAT HOLLOW

Bernard Westbrook continued through the dense forest in pursuit of his horse after the episode at the ford which marked the exciting finish of his first ride with Angenette Clifton; but he was not familiar with the topography of the country and soon discovered that he had not only lost his horse, but that he could not find his own way out. The ravine which he thought would eventually lead him back to the club-house, wound on and on into the Yoakum Ridges, several miles from there.

It was growing dark. The sun had been hidden for some time behind the high knob to the west and the tall woods that grew along the river seemed to hasten the coming of darkness. Seeing no evidence of inhabitants, Westbrook decided to make a final effort to return to the main road, hoping to join there a passer-by in a wagon who would take him to the club-house. But he soon discovered that he could not retrace his steps. He was not especially afraid of wild animals, although wolves, panthers, catamounts and occasionally a cinnamon bear were to be found in that locality; nor was he afraid of the band of mountaineers known as Bald Knobbers,

for he was by nature no coward and was upon this occasion well armed, but the idea of spending a night amid such lonesome surroundings did not appeal favorably to him.

"I will go on up the valley, hoping that I may come upon a woodsman's hut where I can find accommodations for the night or get a guide to lead me out of this dreary place," he said, as he stopped to listen, but no sound greeted him except the muffled roar of the river a mile away, and now and then the bay of a deep-mouthed fox hound trailing some denizen of the forest on a distant ridge. Once he caught, for a moment, the blue gleam from two fiery eyes through the branches of a clump of scrub-cedars; then he heard a low growl, but with the click of his revolver the lights shifted and faded and he could hear only some soft-footed beast skulk away through the woods.

He laboriously made his way over the hills and hollows for there was considerable undergrowth; however, the branches of the giant trees grew so far above his head that but few of them hung down low enough to obstruct his course. The way had been so difficult that it was nearing midnight when he climbed to the top of a hill and looked in all directions for the gleam of a candle through the little window of some hut, but he saw only a flickering light under the arching ledge in a ravine below. He determined to ascertain whether it was from a camp-fire, a cabin, or from the last smoldering coals of a for-

est fire. He had rounded the bluff and was within a few feet of the fire before he was discovered by two shaggy men, who leaped to their feet under a shelving rock, each leveling a Winchester rifle at him.

"Don't shoot; I mean no harm. I am lost and trying to find my way to the Wessex clubhouse. Could you tell me the direction I am to take or where I could find lodgment for the night?" Westbrook said in a friendly tone.

The men proved to be old Yank Doty and Jabe Hook and the place was Wild Cat Hollow.

"Calk'late ez how hit's 'bout six mile to whar yo' say yo' air boun' fer, but we ain't ap' ter be taken in sech an easy way ez this," replied Jabe eying the newcomer keenly.

"I hardly get the meaning of your words."

"Fact is we've had dealings with too many rev'noo officers not to be able to size one ep when we run onto him, 'sides a feller like you ain't ap' to be pryin' round fer nothin' at this time o' night. So I 'low ez how ye'd better put ep your paws."

Believing that he had met up with Bald Knobbers, Westbrook extended both hands above him as directed, seeing that resistance was of no use under the circumstances:

"Put 'em up a leetle further. Now, Yank, you search him," commanded Jabe who still held his gun on a level with Westbrook's eyes.

When a revolver was found on the intruder the old men said they needed no further evidence

to prove that he was in the employ of the government and had come to arrest them; however, they wondered at his audacity in coming alone, but they expected that deputies would arrive any minute to assist him.

"Ef you find the warrant fer our arrest on him er his papers showin' his authority, er his star, we'll make short work of him an' git away afore the res' of his gang comes," said Yank.

But nothing was found to indicate that their prisoner was a revenue officer or had any authority to arrest them. They eyed him closely with a puzzled look. Jabe Hook, who could read a little, ascertained from a card found in Westbrook's pocket-book that his name tallied with the one he had given them and that he was a member of the Wessex Club of St. Louis.

"Looks a little square, don't hit? Don't 'zactly see through hit, but I 'low ez how we ortn't take no chances er run any resk," said Jabe, adding, "Guess ye'd better git back betwixt these rocks awhile ontel we decide what to do with yo'."

It was some time before it dawned upon Westbrook that he had found a moonshiner's retreat of which he had heard so much but had never seen. He looked at the men interestedly, despite his growing fears that they might kill him if they became convinced that he was a revenue officer seeking their arrest. Notwithstanding the fact that death seemed to stare him in the face, he showed his coolness by quietly fill-

ing his pipe which he leisurely smoked in an apparently unconcerned manner although the muzzle of a Winchester rifle was kept pointed at his breast.

One of the old mountaineers, noticing this admirable display of nerve, remarked:

"He ain't no tenderfoot, whatever he be."

Yank Doty was a typical "wildcatter." He was one of the old-timers, a rugged, picturesque character, who regarded whisky making as the natural right of every American citizen. It was tyranny, he declared, for the government to interfere with his private business affairs.

Jabe Hook was also an old weather-beaten mountaineer. He was a type not often seen now, even in the remote parts of the Ozarks. In appearance he was extremely rugged. His gray beard was long and faded. His eyes were faded in color, too, but they shone with a natural fire. Hook's manner was decidedly defiant once when he appeared in court. He was not abashed at the presence of the judge, and showed no humiliation. In his opinion the whole proceedings were an unjust imposition and an infringement on his natural rights.

Westbrook remembered that seclusion, of course, was always sought by the moonshiners in selecting a location for their stills. It was their aim to operate as far away as possible from the traveled roads. Often they took advantage of natural caves, ledges of rock and other recesses in the hills in constructing their secret

distilleries. He had also been told that scouting through the mountains in search of moonshiners had always been regarded—and with good reason—as dangerous business. Good marksmanship was generally one of the accomplishments of the moonshiners, and often they did not hesitate to shoot in order to protect their property. They frequently had the advantage, too, of being more familiar with the topography of the country than their pursuers.

All this came back to him as the result of the law of association of ideas. He wondered how he happened to know so much about moonshiners and their methods after he came to think of it. But he was somewhat surprised to find that a moonshine still is a very simple and inexpensive contrivance, consisting of a kettle in which the corn-meal mash is boiled, a coiled pipe, or "worm," which carries off the steam from the kettle, a supply of water to cool the worm and condense the steam, and other utensils, the principal one being for the boiling of the distillation after it is condensed.

Westbrook who had never been at a loss for appropriate words in presenting arguments to lead men to reason as he so desired, was apparently powerless to impress the truth upon these old moonshiners although he employed all the persuasive language at his command. But while the keepers of the distillery were pondering what disposition should be made of their supposed enemy, a peculiar call came from the ridge above,

followed in a few minutes by another, which was answered by one of the old men guarding him. It was the warning and the password known to many in that community who were patrons of the still.

In a short time a half dozen men came stumbling through the leaves down the bluff to the distillery. They were Bald Knobbers who said they had been fox hunting and decided that they needed some of the contents of the still. They had already consumed a large quantity of liquor and as a result were somewhat boisterous. Soon after they had gathered at the still some of the boys began having fun with old Yank Doty while Jabe Hook measured out the amount of whisky called for. Westbrook, who had been standing in one corner of the recess in the rocks, was now practically obscured from view by the shadows cast by some of the Bald Knobbers. The light from the fagots was rapidly fading. He at once recognized Wade Drexel. Having been unarmed by the old men he was glad he was where none of the gang could see him, for he would be called upon to settle his old score with Drexel. He feared that his captors would turn him over to the ruffians, but in trying to protect their still and to prevent the rowdies from carrying off several jugs of whisky which had been left near the still, they seemed to forget their prisoner.

"I'll put the fire out, boys, while the rest of you seize a jug and run," said Drexel.

When the flickering fire was extinguished it was very dark, for no other light was at hand. This was Westbrook's chance, so he bounded into the crowd, knocking two men to the ground, one of whom caught his ankle, causing him to fall against the hot rocks around which the fire had been built, but he was soon on his feet. Jabe Hook seized him, but he was too strong for the old man and flung him away, and, overpowering Drexel and others of the gang he fought his way down the hill, and with great difficulty escaped, finally making his way to a place of safety among the rocks at the base of the bluffs. Many shots rang out simultaneously and the high cliffs across the river repeatedly echoed the sounds at that quiet hour, and Westbrook knew well for what purpose they were fired. After a long and weary tramp, beset with many dangers and trying experiences, he accidentally came upon the road leading from the valley and reached the club-house about day-break.

On the following day Doty and Hook, fearing that their mysterious visitor of the previous night would return with assistance and arrest them, moved their distillery to Rocky Canyon.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF A GREAT SACRIFICE

It was growing late in the afternoon and the light was gray and melancholy. A fine rain had been falling all day, but had ceased, leaving the sky like a smooth dome of somber lead. The wide flat sandstones in the front yard were drying now, in patches.

Angenette Clifton was looking out of the window when there came a knock at her door, which interrupted a long train of thoughts. She was standing in a quaintly furnished room where she spent much time with her books or engaged in fancy needlework; for at times she liked to be alone, but often solitude was unbearable to her.

It was her foster-father, Wilfred Clifton, a Canadian, of the frontier type—a brave stalwart man of sterling qualities, earnest in good or evil, as his general aspect would indicate, but a man that the hill folk could not understand—he was one of them but so different in his ways and manner of speech they had begun to realize that he was better and higher than they. His conversation, like his manner, was direct, quick and to the point, except when he related an animated story of his pioneer life in the North. He had brought Angenette from the region of the Lake-

of-the-Woods to the Ozarks when she was merely a child, and she had but a few vivid recollections of her life in the great forests in that realm of snows. She had been left to him by her mother when very young, consequently she did not know much of the lives of her parents, and Clifton had never told her, usually evading the answers to her questions regarding such matters, but he often promised to tell her the story when she became a young woman. She had wondered why her room was furnished so differently from any other room she had ever seen and where such peculiarly designed furniture came from. She only knew that it was brought from their far northern home; that it had been used by her ancestors and was very old. Each piece still represented considerable value; nothing similar to it could be found except, possibly, in some old shop where relics and curios were kept for sale.

Clifton cast a somewhat troubled look at the girl out of steel gray eyes as he dropped into the heavy high-backed chair at the end of the carved mahogany table where he sat opposite Angeline for some time without saying a word. He glanced at the life-sized portrait of a handsome woman, evidently made while she was still young. Only a hasty comparison was necessary to tell the most casual observer that there was a striking resemblance between it and Angeline, who, according to her foster-father, was the exact mold of her mother. The girl cherished the likeness, for it told her more of her

mother than she had been able to obtain from any other source. She often noticed, too, how much her foster-father prized the picture.

Angenette looked inquiringly into the man's steady eyes after she had brushed his long hair, streaked with gray, back from his forehead with a tender hand and pressed a loving kiss on his brow, now furrowed by the cares of many trying years. She said as she resumed her seat:

"Father, dear, you have come to relieve my loneliness by reciting a story of your adventurous life among the Indians and trappers of the land of my birth of which I always delight to hear. It has been so long since you used to tell them during the dreary winter evenings when we sat by the hearth where the great wood fires were built. Won't you repeat one for me now?"

Wilfred Clifton saw dimly, framed in the indistinct twilight of the past, the face of her mother, beautiful and benevolent as he harked back to his earlier days. Then arose more distinctly clear the primitive mission of St. Cecelia where lived the simple and kind Sisters of Mercy; the clear chimes of the mission bells; the fur wrapped, silent Makaws; the long tramps on the dry crackling snows; the glimmer of a faint yellow light from the little window of a house perched on a hill far away at which he stood gazing for hours dreaming, dreaming. Then the brief bright days when she grew to womanhood, the luster of her luminous eyes, the music of her voice, the elasticity of her step—all came trooping *before him*.

He drew from his coat pocket his friend in time of trouble—an exquisitely carved brier pipe—slowly crumbled a quantity of home-grown tobacco in his left hand, poured it into the bowl of the pipe, pressed it down with one finger while he reached into an inner pocket for an old ivory match-box bearing a strange coat-of-arms, which Angnette's grandfather had owned, lighted the pipe, and soon white rings of smoke began ascending to the ceiling. He had not yet spoken to the girl who sat with one arm leaning against the table. Then, he recited in a most effective manner, in semi-poetic language, at times rising and pacing the floor with long strides, again sinking back into his chair, white and trembling, with one hand pressed against his heart, the following narrative of his great sacrifice upon the altar of love:

“It was in the Moon of Falling Leaves, the time of the dance of the hunt and the old-time plays, when the last birds were leaving the wine-colored oaks over which sand-hill cranes were circling and teals and mallards were fast deserting the prairie sloughs and emerald pools, that I first saw her, she who held the cup of bliss to my lips for a time and then, ah, it was dashed to earth and a shadow hid the sun of my life. But no blame was hers—I did it myself and have no regrets, although if I could have foreseen the dreary hours that the years have held since then, and could have felt the ache in the heart that ever lingers—would I have done it? ah, yes!

But she was so fair, so very fair, and the glory of her eyes, her haunting eyes—never will the sun shine on such another!

“When I told my love, she insisted that if she yielded she might cause disaster to some life, whose she would not say; but soon I knew there was another in the land from which she lately came, who also could not rest after he had looked upon her. And I, although of no mean lineage, was not so blind with youthful love but that I could see how deep was the gulf between us; for I had heard how her father, a nobleman, who was a political agitator, had incurred the displeasure of the reigning autocracy in Russia by opposing them and to escape the terrors of exile to the mines of Siberia, with which he was threatened, fled across the sea and found liberty among the Makaws and the Crees, bringing the lonely daughter into a strange land of strange customs and manners where death soon ended the old statesman’s troubles. But the daughter was taught by the Sisters of Mercy at the little mission and she soon became like the other women of the North, and yet, how unlike them! She was declared to be the queenliest of all the women in the province. The simple Cree and the silent Makaw came and wondered at her! the rough woodsmen paid homage to her, and her hand was sought by the most chivalrous of all the land; and I, who seemed to find the greater favor in her sight, was the most devoted of all. I was a regular attendant at the

Sabbath services at the mission where she was always to be found, but I scarcely knew when song was raised or prayer was uttered, for my thoughts were all of her. The long miles over the drifting snows and the sweep of the winter wind were unheeded, if I knew at the journey's end there waited for me the touch of her warm soft hand and the glowing warmth of her smile.

"Then spring came and the triangular lines of waterfowls, seeking again their northern homes, were seen darkly outlined against the sky; the aurora borealis silently withdrew and the cold breath of the Frost Spirit that had turned every naked clod to stone, breathed upon them once again from another point of the compass and wooed from their frozen hearts the buttercup and the bluebell. All of nature's creatures felt the call that made each heart beat faster. Strutting in all their pomp before the hens, the splendidly groomed pheasant cocks were seen on dress-parade, and myriads of birds flew by, always two and two; far in the depths of the leafing forest was heard the echoing challenge of the moose. I, too, heard the call of the season.

"The air was filled with the pungent smell of the pine and the faint odor of forest mould, when one fine day I shouldered my rifle and plunged into the woods. My footsteps were scarcely audible on the thick carpet of pine needles that stretched out in a brownish color far under the arching boughs which shifted and shredded the

struggling rays of the sun as they pierced the blue shadows that always lie in the depths of a great forest. It had long been my custom to seek solace for all my woes in the forests, where I frequently made excursions, wandering aimlessly for days until the wound in my heart was healed by nature's gentle touch; but it was not for such purpose that I now struck out across the hills toward the little lake district—it was merely to satisfy a strange restlessness, for I had not seen the one with the haunting eyes for days. I knew not how long my fancy would keep me in the woods. I had nothing to insure me against hunger at such times except my trusted rifle, and had little hopes of finding the hut of a woodsman or trapper; but I felt that he who was not courageous enough to brave the perils of the forest alone could not force success from the battle in the world of men which each must fight for himself.

“I turned and wandered up the banks of a stream, seeking the old path that led by St. Cecilia's Mission. I had nothing stronger than premonition to base my reasonings upon that I should find her there, but, fired by a little flame of hope, I pressed on rapidly. It was morning, and the one I sought was strolling in the woods, gathering flowers, which was her custom during the spring months. So not far from the mission where I had passed so many joyful hours with her during the past winter, I suddenly came upon

her. I hastened forward and knelt at her feet, clasped and kissed her hands. It was there in that ancient wood that I poured out my heart's flood to her, bade her speak and bid me live, told her I was ready to face death for her sake, if need be. I looked at her expectantly while the heart of the world seemed to cease beating and the sun seemed to wait in its course up the fervent sky; the harps in the great pines were hushed, the wind crept to its cave, the streams ceased to flow and slept in pools, and stillness seemed to reign everywhere. She did not speak, but although I heard no word I read farewell on her trembling lips and in her tear-dimmed eyes.

"I must wait until the following morning for her answer. Oh, that night of all long nights! I wandered, wandered—it seemed for ages. Sleep would not come to my relief; the forest's voices, instead of giving their usual solace, seemed mocking me and all conspired to fill me with doubt. But morning finally came and I hastened back to our trysting place. She came and the smile she wore dispersed the shadows from my world. The words she uttered were those I had anxiously waited to hear. Then we traversed the little wood-path together, hand in hand, out into the open fields. If we had thus gone down the path of life together—but of that I will not think. Why did we not? I was young, and to youth duty often appears in quite a different aspect from that which it has in our older years

when selfishness has gradually pushed aside our better attributes and forms a greater part of our nature."

So animated had Clifton's manner become in the recital of the story of his life's history that formed the most important chapter of all, that Angenette, half startled, sprang from her seat and rushed to him as he stood in the center of the room wildly gesticulating, threw her arms about him and begged him to cease. But he would finish the story, and after he had laid his pipe, which had long before ceased to burn, on the mantel-shelf beside an old Venetian vase which Angenette had filled with last summer's rose-leaves, he stroked his hair with both hands and concluded the narrative with less animation, but with more pathos in his voice:

"The world was happy and the future seemed bright until I was at last able to solve the problem why she with the luminous eyes had seemed so reluctant to return my love, for one day when the summer had almost passed, while I was returning from my favorite angling stream through the wood-path that led past the mission, I fancied I could hear a man's voice pleading for the love of a woman, and then I heard, as I stealthily drew nearer, the unmistakable voice of the one I loved telling him it could not be. He reminded her that she had long ago promised to become his wife; that he had braved the dangers of land and sea in seeking her, and that he would no longer be put aside. Then the strange man

that was trying to thwart my love clasped her in his arms. I raised my rifle and in another instant would have dropped him at her feet—dead—had he not turned his face toward me, when I discovered that it was my staunchest friend, my companion of a few years previous when we were inseparable in old Bordeaux. There he risked his life to save mine by plunging between me and a murderous stiletto in the hands of a jealous toreador of Madrid. Then we parted, I to the New World, and he to the interior of the continent, I knew not where, and had never again heard of him. So loyal had we been that I could not restrain my desire to run forward and greet him, although the hurt in my heart still rankled, but I thought, perhaps he could not know nor understand.

“Thus we met again, and when we recited our adventures together the poor girl looked at us pittingly, and neither of us knew why the color in her face so quickly came and went, nor why her voice was husky and her words few, but I resolved to know more of the truth that I felt she had been trying to keep concealed. I learned that she had been betrothed to my friend, who could boast of distinguished ancestry; that after our separation he had gone to Poland where they met and loved. He, too, left that country when he was suspected of being an enemy of the autocracy. She promised to wait and he swore to join her in a short time. A year passed while he searched throughout all Canada for her. He

had just now found her and was retelling the story of his love.

"Days passed and she would not consent to be his bride, neither would she refuse to permit him to see her, while I was torn between two opinions, feeling that the world would be lost in losing her, but that I owed my friend a debt of gratitude which it was my duty to repay with some noble deed. When he learned that she had promised to be my bride and that the day was not far distant when I was to lead her to the altar, believing that nothing remained that was worth living for—his confidence in me, his trusted friend, having apparently been betrayed and she now refusing to keep her sacred promise to him, he resolved to seek forgetfulness of it all in death, and was about to end his life by leaping from the verge of a precipice. But I came upon him there in my wanderings through the woods and dissuaded him; told him that he had been mistaken; that she loved him and that there was nothing between us, I having relinquished all claim upon her affections. Whereupon he resolved to live and further press his claim for her hand, while I, God knows how I suffered, and how I sought vainly for solace in the things that used to bring peace!

"She could not understand why I showed an apparent coldness, for I was less ardent in my manner, and seldom saw her. My visits to the mission ceased entirely and I was absent for weeks at a time in the woods. Finally, believing that my *affections had* waned or been transferred

to another, she gave herself to my friend, and never before had St. Cecelia's Mission seen such a brilliant wedding, but each stroke of the iron-tongued bells that proclaimed the glad tidings to that community pierced my heart; and ever since that night the sight of a mission, of a Sister of Mercy, brings it all back again.

"But she eventually learned the true story of my sacrifice for my friend and benefactor, which fact caused her to treat me as though I was more than other men, and many a little act of kindness she did for me. One day the gates of heaven were left ajar and a little cherub wandered out and could not find its way back, so it came to her home. It had her eyes, so full of wondrous beauty, and it had, too, its mother's raven hair. Then came that terrible winter when death stalked through the north lands, when the icy Arctic blasts swept through the woods and took away the breath of him who was my friend in youth, and congealed the blood of her with the wonderful eyes, who, with a blessing as tender and saint-like as if it had come from the great white throne up yonder, laid the cherub in my arms to be mine forevermore. Then all was over—once more the world had no light left in it except one little ray, which was—you, the cherub; and they whose lives then ceased, lives as pure and holy as the stars, were—your parents!"

As Clifton concluded he stood before the life-size portrait of Angenette's mother, with the girl clinging about his neck and softly sobbing on his *shoulder*.

CHAPTER IX

A FOREST SANCTUARY

Bernard Westbrook had been resting from the fatigue of his strenuous experience with Angenette Clifton's pony and his night in Wild Cat Hollow, so did not take to his riding again for several days, spending the time reading at the club-house or fishing in the nearby stream. He was fond of angling and always succeeded in taking a goodly number of fish, but he noticed that luck was not favoring him as formerly. He frequently met some of the hill folk carrying fine strings of mountain trout and sun-perch with only a few small ones. He finally decided that he was too restless to fish and that he had better employ his time in another way until his usual patience returned, so he strolled out across the woods in the direction of the Clifton residence early in the afternoon. His steps were at first somewhat leisurely and he frequently stopped to examine a wood-anemone, an unusually fine fern, or a stone bearing the remains of some specimen of the low forms of animal life that flourished ages ago before the mountains had risen from the slimy bed of the sea. But on this occasion it was only a short time until his interest in the beautiful and wonderful forms of nature about

him gave way. - He had been restless for several days. Quickening his steps he soon ascended to the summit of the larger ridge that intervened between the narrow valley of White River and the low range of hills where nestled the Clifton home. He removed his hat and turned his face toward the south so that the gust of wind which he saw stirring the leaves down the ridge could cool his temples. He seated himself upon a large gray rock half in the shade of a dense bur-oak. From this vantage-ground he had a splendid view of the country to the south along Beaver Creek and Iron Knob, and for a time he drank in great draughts of ozone that pervaded the pure mountain air, so different from the dust-polluted, smoke-surcharged air that lay heavily along the great river in the city from which he came; and his nature-loving eye, which had long been trained to appreciate natural beauty, feasted on the scene that stretched out before him.

"How seemingly quiet! not a sound, no motion except the dash of the winding stream in the distance," he mused. "This is indeed freedom. Who would ever tire of a life spent amid scenes like these?"

Then philosophizing for awhile, he said:

"And yet there is a great warfare, a mighty struggle going on before my eyes. There is the conflict in the animal and insect worlds for the right to live their little lives; there are thousands of plants battling for breath, to draw their life blood from the mineral kingdom below, to

lift their puny heads against gravitation toward the sunlit sky. But how insignificant is all this to one pang of unrest in the human heart as I feel now." He looked longingly in the direction of the green crowned hill, where, hid away among protecting trees, stood the cottage of the one he thought could change the unrest in his bosom to tranquility.

With such thoughts as these Westbrook arose from his seat on the rock, stretched his arms skyward to relieve their tension, heaved a deep sigh and resumed his journey. He had not gone far when he stepped on a loose stone that rolled down the side of the ridge, causing him to plunge on rapidly toward the ravine below. Unable to stop the momentum, for some time he dashed through the low hung branches of the scrub-oak and cedar until he came upon a large rusty rattlesnake coiled under a bunch of prickly-pear. It drew back its head to strike just as Westbrook started to make the fatal leap, but he was not altogether unskilled in woodcraft, and his quick ear caught the faint hollow buzzing of the rattles that was a warning of death, and with a single bound, like a startled deer, he cleared the reptile by several feet. With another leap he landed close beside a strange figure standing very still near a small cedar. A second glance showed that it was an Indian—young Hawk-Eye, an Osage, who had come to the Ozark Mountains to make his home, having heard through the traditions of his ancestors of

the fine hunting and fishing that was to be found here. He felt the call so strongly that he left his tribesmen for the more enjoyable region where game was plentiful.

Observing with his black, piercing, bead-like eyes Westbrook's somewhat agitated manner, the Indian said simply:

"Muchum skeerd?"

Westbrook labored pantingly up the hill back to the clump of prickly-pear about which the rattlesnake coiled. Although he had never been familiar with Indians he saw nothing in the kindly, silent red man, who appeared to be civilized, to arouse his fear, for Hawk-Eye was by no means a giant in size; however, his lithe, wiry frame denoted great endurance. He had not decked himself either with paint or feathers, although he was oddly costumed, wearing a deer-skin waistcoat and long fringe on his trousers, a necklace of otter tusks and buckskin moccasins.

Upon seeing the snake the Indian laid down his gun, not caring to waste any ammunition on it, and killed it with one skillful blow from a stick. He severed the long string of rattles with his sharp hunting-knife and presented them to Westbrook.

"Keep him; I makum belt out him skin," said Hawk-Eye.

Although Westbrook asked many questions of his new acquaintance before leaving him, he got few answers. However, he learned that he

had nothing to fear from the Indian and that he would be welcome to visit his cave, if he could find it, but he was not given any directions as to how this could be accomplished. Hawk-Eye shouldered his rifle and without ceremony moved away with long strides down the ridge, while Westbrook, noticing that the afternoon was half gone, hastened on to the ravine through which flowed a swift mountain stream. He followed it for a short distance until he came to a tree trunk, which the wind had cast across the stream, forming a foot-bridge. When he had crossed, he lost no time in his efforts to find the cottage which he sought. But he did not reach it, for, somewhat to his surprise, he heard only a short distance to his right the merry laugh of a young girl. He listened, and soon another outburst of hilarity reached him. Ascertaining the direction from whence it came he resolved to investigate. He crept stealthily along from tree to tree, his heart beating somewhat faster, but not from fear. It had dawned upon him that the object for which he had tramped through the woods in the hope of seeing was even now close by.

He was discovered before he had approached very near. Angenette's keen eyes had long been too well used in the forest to permit any object to pass near them without being detected. A life so much of which had been spent in the open had taught her to notice little things, so the breaking of a twig or the rustle of a leaf was

enough to attract her attention. She thought at first that it was Drexel, and not caring to see him, made ready to flee up the hill to the house, but since she was accompanied by her friend, Bessie Ellsworth, who lived a few miles beyond Panther Ridge on Swan Creek, where Angenette often visited when she became lonely or had a secret to impart, she decided to await the approach of the man she could see only indistinctly through the thick foliage.

Westbrook looked between the boughs and saw that the girl was gazing directly at him.

He was instantly recognized.

"Hello, woodsman! Hurry,—we have reserved a seat for you here on our throne," shouted Angenette.

Westbrook soon stood before her, thinking that she had rightly named the huge stone upon which she sat, a throne, for it held none other than a queen. This was her favorite retreat where she often came on such afternoons in summer with a favorite book for a companion; sometimes her day-dreams would lapse into real ones, the distant rumble of the old water-mill wearing the languid hours away or the soft murmur of the nearby spring as it hastened to the little creek below, lulling her to sleep. But today she was accompanied by a devoted associate who had come to the Ozarks from the mountains of Virginia. In Bessie Ellsworth, Westbrook saw, in the exuberant beauty that belongs to one of such tender age, another surprisingly attractive

girl just on the verge of womanhood, but she was not the type he most admired. She was not nearly so tall nor possessed the stately grace of Angenette, but hers was a stouter figure, a full rosy face vigorous with health. Her blue eyes were clear, innocent and placid; a brow upon which sat the serenity of perfect mental and physical poise; a chin well proportioned and with assurance in every line; a rosebud mouth with quizzical lines about the corners where the sweetest of smiles ever lurked. She had a splendid crown of golden hair which shed off the sunlight in a lustrous glow, and a general aspect so pleasant that one felt happier the moment one came into her presence, and that it was good to be alive. There was something about her denoting that the vigorous vintage of old colonial Virginia coursed through her veins. She was modest but not over timorous, nor ill at ease in the presence of strangers, like so many young girls of the rural districts. Her voice was soft and rich in tone, decidedly southern in accent, but she was singularly free from affectation.

"I am indeed delightfully surprised to find you here. Fate seems to decree that our meetings shall be informal, but I like to get away from the stern conventionalities that govern society, preferring sometimes, hours of unrestraint," began Westbrook after he had formally greeted the two who looked pleasantly down from their position upon him as he stood with bared head vainly scanning the rock upon which

they sat for a way to scale to the top, since they had invited him to do so.

"I should say that this is a fort, a redoubt or a tower in a castle rather than a throne, for it seems impregnable and unscalable. I fear I shall not be able to take it by storm, so I shall be compelled to surrender as your prisoner, begging for lenity," he said.

"The ransom we shall ask for your release will be so exorbitant that no one would be willing to pay to set you free," returned Angenette laughingly.

"With such fair jailers, I am sure prison life would be delightful and no ransom would be desired. Under such conditions I should prefer a life sentence," he said.

He was shown a series of natural steps on the opposite side of the big sandstone boulder and he ascended to the top, upon which he reclined, leaning upon his hand and resting his elbow upon a cushion-like spot of green rock-moss, directly in front of the two.

"What a picture—oh, if I were only an artist!" he said as his searching eyes noted the striking beauty of the two girls clearly outlined against the dark background of green leaves which hung down from the dense sugar-maple behind them; the effect being greatly heightened by the sharp contrast of the two, one a decided blonde, the other a pronounced brunette.

For reply they both smiled genially.

"Here is the hero I told you about who did me such a great favor," said Angenette to Bessie.

"It was certainly noble of him to risk his own life to save yours, for surely Cricket would have dashed against that engine and killed you," said Bessie, adding beamingly: "I hope you have fully recovered from your recent harrowing experience, Mr. Westbrook."

The man was visibly annoyed and he started to frame an answer so curt as to end the subject, feeling that he had done nothing to be the worthy recipient of such flattery, meriting no hero worship, but he dismissed the idea by attributing such a feeling to his supersensitiveness which was one of the potent yet regrettable factors in his many-sided nature. The distrustful and suspicious element in his character had developed very largely since he had become a counselor-at-law and had seen so much selfishness and chicanery manifested in human nature.

But before he could reply Angenette relieved the situation by saying that she hoped their next ride together would be without accident and with less excitement.

"A ride with such an agreeable companion could not be wholly devoid of pleasure to me no matter what should transpire to mar it. I felt much relief after the race when I found that it did not end disastrously, as I had begun to fear it would, before the final stake was reached

in the last heat, as we would say at the races; and my chief pleasure was that my gentle competitor in the race came out unscathed, winning the prize for best horsemanship," said Westbrook; but not caring to dwell upon their experiences of the afternoon of their last meeting, he hastened to give a plausible excuse as to why he had come.

"I was about to follow the wrong side of the ridge stretching toward Iron Knob in attempting to come from the club-house to this cluster of hills, not being thoroughly familiar with the topography of these heights and hollows, and had I not heard your mirth as I was passing I would never have known that I was near your home; however, I am greatly pleased that I have chanced to meet you here at—what do you call it?—your throne; very well, or better, if I should prefer to rechristen the place—I shall allude to it as my forest sanctuary, remembering it as the place where I came to worship."

"What kind of religion is yours?—strange, I should imagine; and what have you found to worship here?" inquired the brunette coquettishly as she tried to hide the merry little twinkle in her eyes of jet.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Westbrook hastened to say with increasing animation:

"To worship a princess of nature's royal realm."

As he gave expression to this outburst of enthusiasm he looked intently into Angenette's glowing eyes and at her face, which, despite her efforts, flushed to a deeper dye the velvet-rose in her cheek.

It was amusing to the fair blonde who was an interested spectator and a quiet listener, and had it not been for her presence, Westbrook would have spoken further, especially when he noted the constantly changing light in Angenette's large soulful eyes assume a sweetly tender gleam as she glanced at him furtively, being unable to hide the emotion she felt, aroused by the deep earnestness of his voice.

"That is so lovely of you; how very kind you are!" she said simply.

Feeling that she was an intruder on the sacredness of the scene, Bessie Ellsworth endeavored to find an excuse for her departure, so that she could leave the two together; but noting the first fore-runner of twilight—the long shadows cast by the tall trees on the summit of the ridge to the west, Angenette suggested that they all take the little path that led to the road which passed her home.

So, reluctantly, they descended from the huge boulder near the fern-covered spring, and slowly climbed the hill until the cottage was reached, where they parted, agreeing that this would not be their last meeting at the forest sanctuary in the little ravine.

But before leaving, Westbrook talked alone with Angenette for some time and gave her the rattles

which Hawk-Eye had given him, recounting his experience early in the afternoon with the rattlesnake and the Indian. She at once began fastening them on her hat to do service as an ornament on the band, remarking that the gift was one she had desired for some time to complete her outing suit.

CHAPTER X

LOVE AGAINST HATE

"It will be settled tonight one way or the other; she has put me off persistently until I am tired of it, so I propose to bring her to time, and if she refuses to marry me at once, I will kidnap her, take her across the border into Indian Territory and force her to keep her promise; but before I go I'll have it out with that tenderfoot from the city who has come between us, for ever since he came here she has not accorded me the kind treatment she used to. Wouldn't you settle it now, Paul?"

It was Wade Drexel talking to Paul Tice, his trusted friend and the ardent admirer of Bessie Ellsworth, as they rode up to the Clifton home, hitched their horses under a spreading oak tree some distance from the front yard fence, unfastened the big handkerchiefs which had been carefully adjusted around their white collars to protect them from the dust, opened the little red gate and followed the winding gravel walk, bordered on either side with old-fashioned heart's-ease. Upon the little vine covered porch sat Angenette Clifton and Bessie Ellsworth. Although they were not expecting callers, they soon determined who the men were as they approached the house, their faces not yet

discernible through the darkness that had crept in on the vanishing shadows of twilight.

The girls had risen simultaneously to greet them. Bessie's manner was, as usual, cordial and pleasant, and she graciously extended a dainty hand to each; while Angenette received them with less show of feeling, but with more formal dignity. After greeting the boys in his usual brusque but hearty manner, Wilfred Clifton, who had been smoking and listening at the light and commonplace conversation of the girls, which caused him to hark back in imagination to the days of the long ago, offered his chair to Paul Tice and withdrew to the rear porch without further ceremony.

Each of the young men noted how beautiful the object of his choice was that night as the girls sat where the rays of yellow lamp-light, streaming through the open door, fell upon them, clearly revealing the large red rose which Angenette had placed in her hair, and paler but not less beautiful ones which Bessie wore on her bosom.

The air was filled with the fragrance of the luxuriant honeysuckle that clambered along the edge of the porch, and a mocking-bird, in the top of the giant poplar tree standing at the edge of the orchard, poured out its flood of rich music in rippling rushes of melody, sometimes soaring high in the air until the song would grow sweetly faint, dropping in liquid notes from the starlit realms as if it were a spirit too pure and exalted to remain longer upon the sordid earth. All other voices were mute as if every creature deemed it a crime to interrupt the

rhapsody of the sweet warbler that alone had the courage to express its joy while surrounded by darkness. How many unhappy earth-bound souls emulate its example? Too often we do not find a joyful voice of praise even when the world is teeming with light.

For a time after the greeting nothing was said, not that either of the men were paying any attention to the song of the night bird, for most men are not esthetic enough to care whether a bird sings or a flower grows; they could get along just as well without them and would scarcely miss them. But there are few women, especially girls of a sentimental age, who do not give evidence of pleasure upon suddenly beholding a rich cluster of flowers; neither do the feathered songsters of the woods sing to them in vain. The silence and seeming indifference of the fair rural maids was largely due to the song of the mocking-bird.

Drexel sat in silence not knowing how he had best go about the accomplishment of his purpose. He knew it would be better to use persuasiveness than to threateningly lay his plans before Angenette, for she had already, upon numerous occasions, demonstrated very forcibly that hers was not a cowardly nature and that her desires must be respected in all matters that vitally concerned her.

Drexel and Tice, according to prearranged plans, endeavored to separate the girls, partly to give the latter a chance to press his suit before competition could intervene to cause him a similar anxiety to that which had troubled his companion during the

past few weeks. But the main object was to give Drexel an opportunity to arrange matters with Angenette, consequently it was with considerable misgivings and reluctance that Bessie Ellsworth consented to repair with Paul Tice to a rustic-seat near the lilacs where the orchard and the front yard joined, leaving the other couple alone. Drexel and Angenette entered the house because the latter did not care to sit on the porch with Drexel, unaccompanied, as she had done on former occasions.

Drexel's sensitiveness caused him to resent this action and he could not help saying with a note of raillery in his voice:

"It seems to me since we are to be married that you might respect my wishes in so trivial a matter as this, but I will not object if, before we leave the old honeysuckle, you give me a kiss or two. I think I have a right to a few."

Then he seized Angenette somewhat roughly by both arms, but she had expected the attack, the warning giving her time enough to plan her defense, and with the quickness of a tiger she wrenched herself loose from his grasp, springing back into the lamp-light that streamed across the porch floor, her eyes fixed with a strange incredulous stare upon his face over which a chalky pallor crept as a malignant gleam shot from his eyes. Realizing that it was now too late for an amicable settlement of differences, he resolved to fight it out with her while his heart was being consumed with love and jealousy. Against this condition was arrayed the fiery hatred that had been smoldering in the girl's bosom since the night

after she first met Westbrook. Her impetuosity could not conceal it longer, and she resolved to tell him that the farce at playing sweethearts must cease then and there for all time to come.

He made another effort to seize her, but she again eluded him, and dashed into the adjoining room. Seeing that she was determined, he desisted and followed her, affecting a careless manner, and dropped into a chair facing her where she sat across the table demurely, glancing at him surreptitiously out of rebellious eyes and wondering what he would say, for she had never before shown such an unmistakable air of antagonism to him. She was fearful lest he might take extreme measures in his efforts to alter her determination, but she did not know what defeat meant when her fighting nature was aroused, and now she felt nerved up to any emergency.

"I have decided that I can't live longer without you, and I have come to say that our marriage must take place at once. What have you to say to that?" said Drexel in a commanding tone.

Angenette arose, the iron entering her soul, walked resolutely to the door as she removed the engagement ring from her finger, and for an answer, turned and threw it on the floor beside him with a startling effect, for he had not expected this and he was for a moment stirred with a sense of infinite anger. He leaped to his feet and advanced threateningly, but stopped and lifted a frowning brow to her in dismayed contemplation. He had been neatly and silently foiled, and his evil eyes now burned red and *ominous, but had a world of pain in their depths.*

"There, this is the end," she said composedly but impressively, "the time has come for us to part. We were silly, irresponsible children when our foolish vows were made; it is impossible to carry them out; our paths must diverge here for ever. Don't try to force me. I know my heart and I know that I do not love you; I never did love you—to think of becoming your wife is madness."

Drexel's face assumed an argumentative expression as he began saying apologetically, after he had remained silent for some time, her words having had a most extraordinary effect upon him:

"I do not mean to go against your will altogether, desiring to leave the time of our marriage entirely with you, if you will still consent to it; but of course, I want you now; however, if you desire it postponed, I shall not object; to think of giving you up entirely—I cannot believe you mean that. Remember what you promised. Do you want to drive me mad, and cause me to become an outlaw, a broken-hearted criminal?"

"Yes, if you have no more stability of character than to degrade yourself because of a disappointment, which should never have a tendency to make one less noble," she returned with lips from which the blood had fled.

Drexel picked up the ring and looked at it ruefully. He was visibly affected and was trembling as he stretched out his arms toward her imploringly.

This move was met only with the ghost of a deprecatory smile, but no word broke the stillness which had become painful.

"I will not be denied ; no one ever dared oppose me before—you will be mine ; I'll see that no one takes you from me. I'll settle my grievance with the man who has dared come between us," Drexel said sternly with a tragically wild gesture.

Angenette marveled at the cold evenness of his voice which aroused anew the somber fury in her breast, and she drew herself up proudly. Whether or not there was a hidden meaning in his last sentence she could not determine, but she had a vague premonition that some one would likely have to suffer as a result, for they were spoken with curious emphasis and almost made her tremble.

"There are two swift horses out yonder waiting to take us across the border—anywhere. If you won't marry me and live here ; if you are afraid that—" began Drexel, his brow throbbing maddeningly, when the fiery brunette, the very embodiment of passion, interrupted, turning to him, taking in her breath sharply as one does who is smitten with a mortal agony :

"I am not afraid of anything ; the horse that is to carry me away from here against my wishes does not stand out yonder nor anywhere else. I told you I did not love you—I hate you—and I would rather die than be your wife for one moment !"

Seeing that his entreaties were but ineffectual, idle words, Drexel said imperturbably :

"We shall see," then sank back into his chair and was silent.

Angenette still demurred ; she would have gladly left the room, leaving him alone, had she not thought

it best to prove to Drexel that she was not afraid of him and could not be subdued. She looked out at the door, eagerly hoping that Paul and Bessie would return and end the scene, but instead of hearing their returning foot-steps on the gravel walk she heard only Bessie's intermittent laughter.

Drexel sat sulkily with his face half buried in his hands—the very picture of despair, his perspiring brow, over which lay his long black hair, wrinkled in thought, strangely oblivious to everything. Angenette breathlessly waited for him to speak. But he said nothing, for he was planning how he could get Bernard Westbrook out of his way, having concluded that he could not compel Angenette to marry him until this had been accomplished.

Such thoughts as these were passing through his brain:

“It were better for that club-man that he had never been born than to cross my path and to take from me the love of the girl I have worked so hard to win, and now so rashly lost.”

He had never dreamed that he would lose her; that any one would dare to thwart him. No shadow of doubt ever clouded his love which he believed would bring him all life's possibilities for happiness. Now that the clouds of opposition and doubt had begun to gather darkly and he contemplated what life's rough road would be without such solace and inspiration, a desperate despair began to gain the mastery of his better nature.

Scenes of days long departed when they were together passed in review before him. He again car-

ried her books home from the little Oak Grove school house and fought for her as the result of many a childish controversy. He again gathered the luscious papaw and the wild haw, climbed the rough oak trees and threw the purple clustered grapes to her, and when they had grown older, he again rode home with her from the old Mount Zion church.

"Is this the end? Is this the end? No; I'll not be cast aside so easily! I won her promise with a struggle and it will take a mightier effort to force me to give her up," he said to himself as he rose from his seat, walked straight toward the door, lifted his hat from among the honeysuckles and plunged into the night without so much as glancing at Angenette or bidding her good-by.

Paul Tice called to him as he crossed the yard not far from where the rustic-seat stood, but he hastened on, making no reply.

Bessie, having heard from time to time fragments of the quarrel, fearing that something had happened to Angenette, took quick leave of Paul and ran into the house. She found Angenette pale and visibly agitated. Bessie looked at her with eyes wide with wonder and then gently took her friend in her arms and kissed her flushed forehead, saying, evidently mistaking the look on Angenette's face:

"I wouldn't look so poutingly over a little quarrel; it will soon blow over, no doubt, dear. Did he hurt your feelings? Tell me about it and maybe we can decide on a scheme that will right matters."

Bessie Ellsworth's nature was so sunny, so effervescent with sprightliness, that those who came

in contact with her, who found themselves within the bounds of her magnetic influence, were sure to feel better, for such a rare nature is like a warm ray of sunshine peeping into a gloomy prison cell, bringing with it cheer and hope, and reminding those who feel its power that life is not all shadow. So Angenette Clifton felt her influence and she was for a time soothed and reconciled.

But when Bessie heard her story, which was of much graver import than she had anticipated, a thrill of horror swept over her and a mist gathered in her tender blue eyes, for her meek spirit could be easily troubled; a little thing could make her glad or a little thing could make her sad. Her nature was always gentle and sympathetic.

"Is there no way out of it? What can I do? Let me help you some way; can't I, dear?" she was saying to Angenette as the latter assured her that she did not believe there was cause for alarm for her sake, but that she feared for Westbrook's safety.

"We must warn him at once and help him if we can," said Bessie.

"But I have broken with Wade Drexel and there will be no retraction, let the worst come to the worst," said Angenette seriously. "For I have recently learned to be a fact what I had long suspected—that he is an outlaw."

So deeply engrossed in thought was Drexel and so impetuous was the storm in his bosom that it was some time before he would tell his companion as they rode home together of the episode. Paul tried vainly to calm him, pleading in a reassuring manner that

all would come out right in the end and promising to aid him in any undertaking.

But Drexel would not listen to advice or heed words of comfort, but he tried to enlist the services of his friend in abducting and carrying away the object of his affection, saying that he would have her regardless of cost.

"Life without her is nothing but hell to me, anyway, so why should I pause to give up my own life, and I am sure I would not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of others, if necessary, to secure her, and to save the humiliation growing out of defeat. I will not be daunted. If there is no other way I will induce our chief to call out the whole band of Bald Knobbers and assist me. There will be hell to pay yet before I am through with this business," Drexel said as they took different courses at the fork of the main road that led through Beaver Creek bottoms.

"Don't start anything you can't finish," returned Paul Tice admonitively.

CHAPTER XI

THE WESSEX CLUB

The summer was passing and hastening to events of unprecedented significance to the people of the Ozarks. It was bringing some hearts closer together and widening the breach between others; it was bringing the keenest remorse to some and sweetest joys to others. It was August and nature in the Ozarks was on the wane. It had been a summer of the gravest apprehension and unrest throughout several counties, principally on account of the feud between the Bald Knobbers and the militia, which had resulted in many killings. Sorrow and fear had been brought to many hearth-stones through the efforts of the former to protect what they deemed to be their interests, and by the opposition to them by the militia who held that the members of the secret organization were enemies of law and order. Some citizens had been forced to leave the country, others had been taken from their homes at night and whipped, and an atmosphere of general unrest was created. Wilfred Clifton, who identified himself with the organization when it was first promoted, soon regretted the act, seeing that the tendency of some of the members was to disregard their solemn oath to use the league solely for the amelioration of

conditions in the community, and were resorting to various kinds of unprincipled deeds in following the dictates of their erratic individualities, consequently he had taken no part in the campaigns of the Bald Knobbers during the summer. He was especially disgusted after Wade Drexel had endeavored to secure aid from the league in ridding the country of Bernard Westbrook, for whom Clifton had the highest regard, believing that he possessed unusual gentlemanly traits and was superior in intellectual attainments and culture to any one he had ever known.

With the exception of a chance meeting at the cross-roads store or at church at old Mount Zion, Drexel had not seen Angenette since the night of their quarrel, and upon each occasion she had pointedly refused to recognize him. She tried to avoid him as much as possible, and her rides up and down the river bottoms were less frequent than formerly and never alone because she feared Drexel was watching for her, which was the very thing he had been doing all summer, often riding over the roads she used to frequent, for no other purpose.

Westbrook and Angenette had met frequently. Accompanied by Paul Tice and Bessie Ellsworth they had taken little excursions to picturesque spots on White River, Swan Creek and Gobbler Bald; they often visited the fern-covered spring near the forest sanctuary, and many were the moon-drenched nights when the mocking-birds sang for them as they sat beneath the trailing arbutus or the clambering honeysuckle at the Clifton home—nights so propitious for love to flower into full blossom in the hearts of youth.

Westbrook had been absent for a month, having been compelled to return to St. Louis for the purpose of disposing of certain business affairs which he had utterly neglected for some time.

"I will return in a few weeks, business or no business, and you will write to me every day while I am gone, won't you?" he said to Angenette as he held her hand while they stood at the gate the morning he went away. He thought her beauty that day rivaled that of the pink morning-glories, bright with the dewy freshness still upon them as they ran riot along the fence nearby.

"And you will not be gone very long, not over a month at the most, I hope?—how lonesome it will be—I hardly know what I shall do!" she said coaxingly.

Westbrook had half a mind not to go at all. But assuring her again that he would soon return, he started away. Wilfred Clifton appeared in the doorway and shouted a hearty farewell to him and assured him of a hospitable welcome upon his return.

During the spring and early part of the summer a number of the members of the Wessex Club came to the club-house on White River and spent a few days. They were business men who could not spare much time away from their affairs. Some of them had questioned Westbrook's indifference in remaining so long on his vacation and had cautioned him against the loss of business and prestige among the members of the bar.

"Oh, let business take care of itself—I am going to stay here until I get fully ready to leave," he *would return* somewhat sarcastically.

But many members of the club preferred to wait until the latter part of the summer to make their visit to the Ozarks and when Westbrook reached St. Louis and reminded them how delightful it was in the mountains at that season, how different the cool nights from the sweltering ones of the city, how beautiful the great woods and clear streams were, a large crowd began making arrangements to accompany him back to the club-house. The wives and daughters and friends of many of the members were to be in the party and two weeks were to be spent camping, fishing, rowing and roaming over the steep sides of the mountains and along the smooth valleys.

Westbrook did not really care whether he saw Cornelia Burwell or not while on this trip home, for her recent life of duplicity and hypocrisy had disgusted him. She had long expected his return, and although she had nothing tangible upon which to base her fears, she had already decided that he no longer cared for her as he used to, partly because he stayed away so long for no apparent good reason, and partly owing to the fact that his letters had been coming at such long intervals; and, reading between the lines of those brief notes she did receive, she thought she could see his lack of concern and feeling compared with that shown by his former letters.

"There is no excuse for brevity," she would say indignantly, "for surely he has plenty of time out there in those mountains to write a long letter whenever he may care to. Something is wrong. I wish I could go down there and see for myself. He must

spend most of his time with some one else. Yet no one but uncouth hill folk live out there; then that cannot be the reason." It had not yet occurred to her that he knew of her double life. She felt that she was clever enough to keep him from ever knowing of her coquetry.

She would ask every one who returned from the club-house on White River many questions about Westbrook, skilfully trying to learn without arousing suspicion whether his attentions were being paid to another. But she gained no information that would give her any light on the subject paramount to her. No one seemed to know anything of his social life there. However, she felt a little thrill when one of the club members told her of two beautiful and apparently well-bred girls who lived in the vicinity of the club-house.

"A blonde and a brunette. The latter is especially attractive and every one who sees her inquires who she is and tries to get an introduction. But I am not sure that Mr. Westbrook knows them," the clubman said evasively.

During his stay in St. Louis, Westbrook's calls on Cornelia were short and infrequent. He made for excuse that he had been away so long it would take him some time to get caught up in his work, so that he could not afford to devote much time to social duties. He had not intended that she should know that a crowd of club members and friends in his set were going back to the Ozarks with him, but she learned of the fact from other sources, and resolved to be a member of the party at all hazards.

When he learned of her decision he was considerably disturbed, for he did not know how he could prevent Angenette learning of his former relations with her. Although he was not sure of Angenette's affections, which she had adroitly kept hidden as much as possible, he had half a mind to tell Cornelia the truth at once, for now he felt that he would be justified in breaking off their engagement and ending it all. He hated above all traits of human nature, duplicity and hypocrisy. He was too noble to play with as sacred a thing as the heart's affections and he had but little respect for any one who would do so. He now had evidence that Cornelia had wantonly mistreated him.

The cold, almost ferocious beauty that lurked in the dark, fiery depths of Cornelia Burwell's eyes and about the little drooping curves at the corners of her half amiable, half scornful mouth, her willowy grace, a compelling rather than a persuasive beauty, had now but slight hold upon the heart-strings of this man. He had forced himself to believe that her wealth and social position would be factors in his fight for power and success, that were worthy of recognition, but he now disregarded them.

"After all my heart is in the hills, and I should rather be there in one of those humble cottages over which the sweetbrier rose clambers—away from the distractions of the busy world—with the love of Angenette to inspire me than to live here with one I do not love, even though I could claim both wealth and fame the rest of my life," Westbrook would say when thoughts of Cornelia arose.

The time for starting to the club-house arrived and the *Wessex* crowd was jubilant in anticipation

of a pleasant time in the beautiful White River country. It was noticed that Westbrook seemed to wear an apprehensive look that indicated some serious misgivings, although he chatted pleasantly regarding the prospects of the outing.

The women members of the party, most of whom had never experienced similar delights before, were profuse in their praise of the splendid scenery, the cool, bracing mountain air, and the pleasant diversion of life at the club-house which they found to be not so devoid of comforts as they had expected. Upon their arrival they looked from its long porch at the broad sweep of the river and gazed long at the high gray cliffs on the opposite bank, surmounted by dense cedars, straggling pines and giant oaks. They felt that they should like to live there for ever. But soon the novelty of such an existence wore away, the monotony of life in such a place together with the thoughts of the revelry and gayety of the metropolis returned and they were ready to leave the grandeur of the hills behind upon the day appointed for their return. How different it was with Bernard Westbrook, to whose finer sensibilities and esthetic attributes the rugged scenes were a source of constant inspiration. He delighted in them rather than in anything that the city had to offer.

Upon Westbrook's return to the club-house, Angenette Clifton, Bessie Ellsworth and Paul Tice came to see him. They were cordially received, introduced to the entire party and were assured of being heartily welcome.

"Surely such people do not live here. How very beautiful those girls are; such wonderful complexions! Who ever heard of such grace and vivacity of manner as the brunette has, and who ever saw more charming simplicity than that of the blonde?" one woman from the city was saying admiringly. And similar thoughts were expressed by others; all the men were unstinted in their praise of the rural maids. It was soon evident that Westbrook and Paul Tice would have rivals and it was not long before vague fears gave way to jealousy on the part of some. Angenette was especially lionized. They were surprised at her ease of manner and many fine traits and they sometimes wondered at her peculiar words and unusual turning of phrases and conception of periods of language; but her lady-like bearing and her clear-cut, handsome features left no doubt with the contemplative minds in the party but that she had "blue blood" in her veins; some even said in their enthusiasm that she must be of royal descent. They never knew how near they were to the truth. She was a study and a mystery to all. Bessie's cheerfulness and charming modesty were also much admired.

"They are certainly out of place here. How they would be raved over at home!" one admirer said. Cornelia Burwell made no comment, but when she saw glances pass between the brunette and Westbrook, the significance of which could not be mistaken, her face went livid, then white and her thin lips compressed. A storm was brewing in her breast. It might be some time before it broke, but

if it ever should, it would be furious and one never to be forgotten, for it was a storm of jealousy, hatred, passion and wounded pride. She felt her spirit swayed with spitefulness and malice.

During the stay of the Wessex Club Angenette and Bessie were frequent visitors at the club-house where they were always paid marked attention, especially by the men, but their object in spending so much time there was not because the club members toasted their beauty and said all manner of flattering things to them. However, such praise was not distasteful or disregarded; but the girls, being careful observers and having well defined reflective capacities, cared more for the benefit they were receiving from association with the cultured ladies of the city. It was an opportunity which Angenette had eagerly longed for. She desired to know how women of their type talked, what they were interested in, what amused them and what their ambitions were. She was, on the whole, somewhat surprised at what she discovered. Their talk was of lighter things than she had imagined it would be and they did not seem to have any particular ambitions to be good, useful or great—apparently contented to drift with life's current, satisfied just to be admired.

Angenette was kept in ignorance of Westbrook's former attentions to Cornelia Burwell. But she wondered why that lady more than any of the rest, seemed to be so deeply concerned about her, for she had closely questioned Angenette as to who she was, where she lived, whether she had known any of the

Wessex Club members before. But she was not able to get anything definite from Angenette's replies for the latter was wary upon most occasions, and she gave no hint of ever having seen Westbrook previous to the arrival of the outing party. She thought she saw in the eyes of her interrogator a peculiar light, a hint of subtle malice, once when she was conversing with Westbrook, when Cornelia had impolitely interrupted them.

Westbrook knew that it would be impossible to keep down suspicion on the part of Angenette concerning Cornelia, in fact, he had begun to fear a disgraceful scene before all the party, and he pondered deeply in trying to reach a conclusion as how best to avoid this. Fate had been kind during the first week, but he feared the climax would be reached during the following half of the outing, for both Angenette and Cornelia were to go camping up the river scheduled for the last days of the trip. But he decided to wait and trust to luck.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHOT FROM THE BUSH

It was nearly sundown when the members of the Wessex Club unloaded their camping outfit several miles up White River from the club-house near Gobbler Bald, where they had come for an outing in the primeval forest, and it was dark by the time the tents were all in place on the carpet of dry pine needles, where the air is balsamic and knows no changes save that which comes with night, for the last days of summer in this region are monotonously delightful, the nights dewless and the air dry but bracing. Soon they chatted by the cheerful camp-fire, giving themselves up to the sweetness of that unmeasured solitude, and let the tranquil leisure of the forest enfold them. The strength of the mountains seemed to be imparted to them. Some were lounging, relaxed upon a bed of balsam boughs, watching the play of lights and shadows in the heart of the forest, reflecting fitful beams along sheltering limbs. Beneath such giant patriarchal trees, beside such crystal, tinkling springs, in the shadow of such rugged heights, what wildness, solitariness, aloofness! In such a region, where on every peak and in every defile there lies repose, the world of care and toil seems far away, and we rest.

The first night in camp was a lonesome one. The campers could hear at intervals the hoot of great horned owls answering each other across the valley, the near bickerings of the screech-owl and the whip-poor-will added its mysterious note. Now and then the profound stillness was broken by the seeming unearthly howl of the big timber wolf. Once the sleepers were awakened by a pack of a score or more of hounds crashing through the woods only a few hundred yards from camp, yelping furiously. At last the sonorous baying grew fainter and fainter down the valley until only an echo from the high wall of rock across the river was audible. At times the breeze moaned piteously through the long, swaying boughs above the tents, and the harps in the old pine trees struck up mournful threnodies, then died away, leaving the solitude unbroken except by the faint lap, lap from the ripple of the rapid river upon its pebbly bars, and its hoarse, distant roar as it glided over the rapids known as Broad Ripple a mile up stream.

When the campers looked about them the next morning, they experienced new and peculiar emotions as the beauties of nature unfolded before them; a wilderness, indeed, but beautiful and inviting. The warm sunshine reddening the fleecy clouds that hung far over the mountains; the dark cedars and the gnarled pines on the crest of the high ridge, the storm wrecked oaks, all darkly silhouetted against the eastern sky; the green ivy trailing down from the shelving rocks and laving in the river tumbling wildly below. All these and the many signs and

sounds of the new life returning to the wild, made the silent watchers stand, filled with wonder and gratitude that they were permitted to share them as man's own heritage.

Some hastened to the river where sported the black bass in quest of which they had come with a goodly array of implements to land the wary fish. A cast, a raise, a strike, the excitement begins! And the tingle of satisfaction that thrills as one reels them in, especially when one has been day-dreaming and is sharply called to account by a wild scream from the reel. When fully recovered from the shock one picks up the rod, and takes a quick glance at the middle of the stream to ascertain the occasion of the disturbance. A look at the reel shows that so much line has been run out; that the spindle is visible through the coils of line. Haste is made to recover line, and the fish gives a little, showing by his resistance and the "feel" of the rod that something of size had been hooked. Then a determined effort; a splash among the weeds on the bank, and the prize is yours.

In such a place where the bass is at his best, all the adventurous instincts of man find free play as well as the beauty loving side of his nature, and old sorrows and animosities lie dormant, not daring to intrude at such a time. What variety! What beauty! What excitement! What sense of seclusion for the tired and the introspective mind! Who does not enjoy such freedom from the scrambling conceits of over refinement; where sparkle clear uncontaminated waters in a region wild and primeval, in-



"The rapid river upon its pebbly bars—"



vested with a sense of remoteness and brooded over by the spirit of solitude, where one may, if one will, become part of the inarticulate life of nature?

But those days of camp life were not without a shadow of sadness to some, for both love and hate were there, bringing unrest in their different ways to the hearts where they had found lodgment. If these can intrude in such a place, where in all the universe of worlds can be found the rare treasure which men call rest? Some there are in all crowds, however small, who carry a darkened heart, although often adroitly masked beneath a wreath of smiles. For a time oblivion may soothe the brain and lay a subduing finger upon the wound in the heart until the ache is no longer felt, but memory seems to be jealous of such magic power and attempts to usurp it, bringing again the dull throb to the temple and fanning to a little flame the smoldering embers on the hearth-stone of the heart, regardless of environment.

It was not long before Cornelia Burwell began to devise a scheme whereby she could prevent Angenette Clifton, who accompanied the club on its camping trip, from being thrown too frequently with Bernard Westbrook, and from time to time she dropped an apparently accidental sentence, although each had been carefully thought out, to be heard by Angenette, relative to the former's engagement to Westbrook.

"Do you notice how attentive my future husband is to that country girl?" she said to a friend whose services she had enlisted in her undertaking, when

no one could hear their conversation but Angenette.

"Indeed, we had all taken due cognizance of the fact; why do you permit it?" Cornelia's confederate responded.

"Oh, we understand each other perfectly, and nothing will come from it, except, possibly, a silly country girl will be sadder, but also wiser, when she awakens to the true situation. We merely wanted to have some amusement at her expense," said Cornelia with a little laugh of scorn.

Angenette's face crimsoned as she sat partly concealed behind a corner of the tent. Although she had known but little of the quips and wiles resulting from a jealous woman's hatred, she knew that the words she had just been compelled to hear were spoken for a purpose, and that they were false so far as they concerned Westbrook; however, she believed that there had possibly been more than mere friendship between them some time in the past, but at present she could not believe in his perfidy, which, indeed, formed no part of his nature.

"He may have been engaged to her," she said to herself, "but I will never believe that his is a dual nature, for I know how he hates duplicity in others, and if he merely wanted amusement he would seek it in quite a different way."

She could scarcely refrain from going direct to Cornelia and in plain but forceful terms tell her what her opinion was of any one who would thus unburden herself with such unbecoming expressions, but to avoid a scene, she arose and walked away.

Cornelia would scarcely permit Westbrook to get out of her sight; she would invariably join him when he essayed to speak with Angenette alone, but the latter noticed that it was always Cornelia, who sought the opportunity to talk to Westbrook, and that he had not volunteered to begin a single conversation with her. Angenette believed that his actions in the presence of Cornelia were prompted by courtesy arising from his good breeding, rather than from affection. But the shadow of a doubt arose in her mind the following day when she was handed a note by Bessie Ellsworth, purporting to have been written by Westbrook to Cornelia before his last visit to St. Louis. It had been found near the tent occupied by Cornelia, and it stated, among other things:

"I can hardly wait until I get home to see you, my own—the light of my life. Oh, if our wedding could only be tomorrow! How can I wait? There is nothing in these dreary backwoods that interests me."

Angenette folded the paper without tremor or comment. She remembered Westbrook's peculiar chirography, and decided that if the letter was a forgery, which she at first believed, his handwriting had been skilfully imitated. She placed it beneath her belt, not knowing but that a time might come when she could use it to advantage. She was puzzled to know what it all meant. Westbrook had, quite inadvertently, scarcely more than spoken to her that day. This made her resolve to encourage, for a time at least, the attentions of Howard Woods,

a young club-man who had been paying her marked attention since he met her upon the arrival of the party at the club-house. So she accepted his invitation to accompany him upon the occasion of the party's visit to Broad Ripple rapids that day.

Westbrook could not understand her actions and was about to accuse her of fickleness, which was, in fact, just the antithesis of her nature; for he knew nothing of Cornelia's conspiracy and of the finding of the letter.

After this their greetings were more formal and lacked something of their former cordiality.

Angenette and Howard Woods were frequently together during the next few days. They noticed that while Westbrook did not seek to interfere, he seemed to avoid Cornelia as much as possible, at times treating her with almost incivility. When the camp was first made he was the readiest with joke or amusing story; now his sparkling wit and repartee was lacking and he had little to say. He often sat alone and smoked. The change was noticed by all, but comprehended by none.

One morning he separated from the rest of the party and went down the river alone, taking with him a few magazines. After he had wandered over a mile from the camp he sat down upon the grassy bank, carelessly threw his hat to one side, and, leaning back against a tree, hastily turned through one of the magazines and threw it into the river. He watched the gliding waters for some time as they bore it under, and then began examining the contents of another. The title of one article attracted him

and he began to read. He kept his eyes fixed upon the page that never turned. He read to the bottom twice, but remembered nothing. Soon the second magazine met the fate of the first, and he sat there empty-handed; and, lulled by the sound of hurrying waters, gave himself up to day-dreams.

A kingfisher, wearing a blue uniform and white shoulder-straps, screamed as he arose from the water, having failed in his plunge for a minnow; and high overhead a crow was dipping through the air at a huge brown hawk that now and then flapped its great wings and sailed smoothly away, apparently not noticing his black tormentor's scoldings. A gray squirrel played in the boughs of the swamp-oak above him and dropped an acorn near where he sat. A trout leaped for a fly, throwing himself two feet out of the water a short distance in front of Westbrook, but he scarcely saw any of these. Such caprices by the inhabitants of the earth and air never before failed to attract his admiring gaze; but now his thoughts were not of them.

"Tomorrow the club will be gone, then I will go to Angenette and explain all," he was saying, "I cannot think of her as inconstant; she has been led to believe that I am untrue or she would never have permitted another's attentions. But why did she doubt me? Will I be able to make everything plain to her? And yet have I not given her sufficient cause to doubt me? I will not censure her for her coldness, but respect her the more for her independence of spirit.

"If I show Cornelia the iciness which my heart feels for her, what might not be the result? I know her impetuous nature too well for that. She would never submit, without a disgraceful scene, to being superseded by a simple unknown country girl, as she regards Angenette. It seems that nothing can as yet be done, but how can I remain inactive any longer?"

While he mused thus, oblivious to his surroundings, a man approached him, silently coming along the river-path, carrying a fishing outfit; he stopped now and then, threw out his line, allowing it to remain a few moments, then drawing it in, he would move on up the stream and repeat the process. He observed Westbrook some distance away when he first rounded the bend in the river, but since he had passed several other fishermen that morning, paid little attention to him. However, when he came within a few yards of the man sitting by the tree, he stopped and observed him closely, then suddenly shrank back behind the trunk of a mountain ash. Leaning his fishing rod against the huge tree which hid him from view, he cautiously looked around one side to make sure that he was not mistaken.

"Oh, I've got you now! This is the chance I have been waiting for—luck has favored me at last," he said with a secret fiendish chuckle as a fierce light kindled in his eyes.

The stranger reached for his long hunting-knife, always to be found in his belt, felt its keen edge, and looked up and down the banks of the river to see if any one was watching.

"The coast seems to be clear," he observed with secret satisfaction. "One sure stab, then this line tied to a rock and fastened about his neck—a splash in the river, and it will soon all be over, and no one will ever know, for old White River tells no tales."

But the man with murder in his heart failed to see a silent watcher a few feet away, concealed behind a dense wild haw bush, who had noted the fisherman's queer actions and had halted on his way through the forest to observe his subsequent movements before he stepped into the path that led along the bank of the river. The watcher behind the bush knew the man seated by the tree and did not wish to see him harmed, so he silently lifted his rifle to his shoulder; soon the sights were on a line with the raised knife in the hand of the fisherman. The silent watcher followed closely with bead-like eyes his every movement, until he had stealthily gained the tree under which Westbrook sat.

Just as the would-be murderer swung around the trunk, raising the knife higher above his head for the fatal blow, a little puff of white smoke leaped from the rifle, a shot rang out simultaneously with an agonized cry from the man who held the knife which dropped from his hand when the bullet struck.

Westbrook leaped up startled. For a moment something warm seemed to crawl slowly over his shoulder from the wound the knife had made in dropping from the hand raised above him; but there was no accompanying numbness and he knew he had received no injury other than a flesh wound. His grip was firm and his hand was steady, for he quickly

recovered from the momentary shock, nerved for the combat, and, seizing his antagonist in his athletic arms, threw him violently against the tree, exclaiming simply:

"I never thought you were such a coward, Drexel!"

The young Bald Knobber forgot his wounded hand, struggling to his feet after making a successful effort to regain his knife. Although Westbrook had learned something of fencing while in college, he had but little dexterity in wielding a bowie-knife, but he kept a steady nerve and watched his chances, poisoning a knife, similar to the one held by Drexel, which had mysteriously dropped on the ground near Westbrook and which he seized while his enemy was staggering to his feet. Quickly they both struck at each other, passed and wheeled. Drexel's inward rage was apparent, for the lust to kill, frequently felt all through his life, again took possession of him, and although he said nothing, Westbrook interpreted the fiendish contortion of his face, noting in his eyes the unmistakable desire to murder as he made a sweep for the attorney's side and missed. Then both fought with determination, each fearing that the end would be death. Drexel believed that if he won the fight his chances to win Angenette would be regained, which thought added desperation to his ire; while on the other hand, Westbrook fought merely to defend his own life, not intending to take the life of the other unless forced to do so; but he replied to Drexel's rush with a sudden stroke, sending the keen blade through the ruffian's clothing be-

tween the left forearm and his side, slightly piercing the former. It was out again before the Bald Knobber fully realized what had happened. Then for a few moments the sunlight, which struggled down through gaps in the overarching trees, flashed from the steel blades which gleamed in circles. The club-man swerved to the left, and none too soon, for the sharp point of Drexel's hunting knife barely missed his right breast. They broke; Drexel then made a desperate attempt to clutch Westbrook's knife hand as they came close together.

Quick as a flash Westbrook raised his bowie-knife, bringing it down on Drexel's shoulder, who, anticipating the blow, had thrown himself forward in order to block it, but his blood-corded neck received a long deep gash as Westbrook drew the knife toward him. The clear daylight was suddenly changed for Drexel into semi-darkness; then a crimson mist drifted slowly before his eyes and he felt a strange weakness creeping over him; he swayed as if about to fall. The hand and the knife of the club-man were red, and there were irregular red spots on the leaves at their feet. But Drexel summoned all his remaining strength for a final onslaught, like that of a mad bull, and the knives came together with a click, each antagonist making several rapid parallel strokes, then coming together, neither daring to break away. In a brief interval both leaped backward, Westbrook receiving a wound in the chest from Drexel's knife; then they both cautiously waited for an opportunity.

. A circular cut from shoulder to waist which *Drexel suddenly let drive*, fell short, the return

flashed straight at the throat, then Westbrook drove in thrust upon thrust, bearing him down toward the brink of the river. A quick side step reversed the position and Drexel dashed at the heart and missed. For a breathless moment the knives flashed in and out. Then they clinched. Westbrook felt the knife hand loosening from his grasp while the grip tightened on his wrist. Something must be done quickly. But they drew apart and circled.

At the rush, blade cut blade, and both were bleeding. Then they closed in, but Westbrook dodged, and a terrible oath from Drexel rent the air as his eyes flashed like cores of fire. He rushed at his adversary like a wild beast on his prey, but Westbrook leaped to one side and Drexel overbalanced, clutched wildly at a frail bough overhead, and, with a cry of terror, plunged into the river.

When he rose several yards below, the surface of the stream was streaked with crimson, and his knife was gone. He splashed desperately for a time, started for the bank, then turned back, evidently not caring to face his antagonist unarmed, deciding that he had better take chances with the rapid current of the river, though wounded. He struck out boldly for the opposite shore while Westbrook watched him, breathlessly. The current swept him down and once he was submerged, but at last he was seen to grasp an overhanging limb from a willow, rest for a few minutes, then climb laboriously up the slippery bank and slowly disappear through the forest across the river.

Westbrook was looking at his wounds, which proved to be scarcely more than severe scratches, not yet fully realizing how narrowly he had escaped death, when he felt a slight touch on his shoulder from behind. Quickly turning, he met Hawk-Eye face to face. He had been silently watching the fight with raised gun ready to help Westbrook if he should need it.

"Muchum hurt?" he inquired, as he looked the bleeding man over carefully from head to foot.

Westbrook assured his Indian friend that he was not badly injured.

"I see him come when you sleep. I shoot when him raise knife," said Hawk-Eye.

"But where did this knife come from?" inquired Westbrook, just then recalling the incident of the knife dropping to the ground at the beginning of the fight.

"I throw him fer you," he replied laconically, adding, as he pointed in the direction taken by Drexel:

"Him bad enemy."

Replacing his keen-bladed knife in his belt and shouldering his long quaint rifle, this bizarre creature then turned to walk away, but Westbrook caught him by the arm and filled his hand with coin.

"Huh!" the Indian said simply, then disappeared down the river.

Westbrook told no one of his exciting experience, but when he reached the camp, everyone wondered at his troubled expression, and at the blood stains on his clothes and why he had been absent so long.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROPOSAL

“Love speaks in many languages and manifests itself in many ways. It makes some languid and others bold; some timidly acknowledge its mighty sway, unable to express their feelings, however much they may desire to do so; it makes others courageous, and they hasten to unbosom their inmost secrets, often regretting, after it is too late, their rashness. Some there are whose affections run to waste because they delay too long revealing the heart’s desires. To some love comes silently, imperceptibly, stealing upon the heart like the tentacles of an octopus upon his victim, slowly but surely until its grasp cannot be shaken off; to others love comes with the rush of a whirlwind, sweeping all before it, which lasts, usually, no longer than the commotion of elements which it resembles. Love brings to some restless days and weeping nights, to others a flood of sunshine whose sweet cheer never wholly vanishes; and sadly true it is that to some love is death. And to all love is sadness, gladness, madness! But the world would, indeed, have little that would appeal to us without it, although it may frequently bring gloom and misery in its train; and so long as the heart has passion, or is touched with sorrow or illuminated by joy, so long as it can feel the throb

of ecstasy or the keen blade of pain, we are to believe that this world is not the end of love, nor the grave the doom, but that somehow, somewhere, we are to take up the old sweet story and live and love as we have loved and lived here."

It was Bernard Westbrook speaking, having been asked by Howard Woods to give his personal views on the tenderest passion that the heart knows, and the latter wondered in which way love would lead him. He had already experienced its coming, but the future of love was not within his horoscope. All his life Woods had successfully withstood the charms of women. His was a critical nature, touched with cynicism. He had sounded the depths of human nature until he had become almost a misanthrope and had decided long ago that he would never put his trust in any woman, being suspicious of the good faith of everyone. But when he beheld the charms, the simplicity, the latent power to attract in Angenette Clifton he was changed, and became a devoted admirer. This man of a practical turn of mind, who had scoffed at the idea of love at first sight, was now its victim.

Believing that he could at once force a return of his mad infatuation by holding out a life of luxury in the metropolis, filled with the glamour of which most young girls of the rural districts dream, he soon decided to offer her his hand and his heart. But he found that for once he had been quite deceived in his effort to properly interpret human character, that she for whom he longed was something more than he had at first believed. He found

that he could not fathom the depths of her extraordinary nature; that he had discovered here in the mountains a young woman of the highest ideals, of the loftiest purposes, and possessing the most admirable characteristics; he had found a pure soul with the rarest traits and most envied capacities, in short—the ideal woman.

Woods's methods were decidedly practical and business-like. He did not understand the ways, customs and manners of the country people. He did not know how to lead up to a proposition in a tentative manner, but in his usual brusque way he at once went to the point in presenting any scheme or plan, expecting the person with whom he was dealing to either quickly accept or reject his proposition, then and there, disposing of it for ever. It was in such a manner that he laid his heart on the altar of love before Angenette Clifton.

Supposing that he had no one to oppose him; that he could have no rival except some unsophisticated mountaineer, not knowing of Westbrook's affection for her, he was very attentive from the time of their arrival at the club-house and during their camping trip on the river. While she did not seem to encourage his attentions, she did nothing to discourage them.

On the morning of the last day in camp he decided to tell her of his affection. Although he had given her little intimation of this decision, she instinctively knew it was coming. Strange and inexplicable are the premonitions that often come to us under such circumstances, yet they are not usually

strong or tangible enough to act upon. Angenette sought to avoid him, for some reason, she could not tell why.

Woods left Westbrook and sought the camp without telling his mission. The latter had noticed his nervousness that morning, and had wondered at his seeking a definition of love at such a time.

He did not find her at the camp, but someone had seen her enter the forest by the path that led to the spring, a short distance away. Woods did not find her there, but soon discovered her enjoying a favorite childhood sport—the comforts of a grape-vine swing. One arm, half bare, was clinging to the vine, while the other held a book open upon her lap which she read while swaying gently to and fro. Her pink bonnet was tossed back, making an admirable setting for her corona of raven hair which delicately shaded her exquisitely rose tinted face. Her long silken lashes and drooped lids obscured her eyes, now half closed and dreamy. Her shapely white throat was bare except for the tastily tied pink strings that held her bonnet in place.

The picture was one to inspire any painter, and Howard Woods, while not of an esthetic nature, stood mute and motionless, gazing in wonderment at the vision. Finally she looked up, somewhat startled, for she had been completely absorbed in the page before her.

“Why, Mr. Woods, I am surprised to see you! I fancied that I was quite alone. How did you learn the way to my retreat? I am sorry my swing is not ample enough to accommodate you also,” she said

with a little laugh that seemed to fill the shaded nook with sunshine and illuminated the heart of the spectator.

She thought she had never seen this somewhat undersized, pale, fair-haired, gray-eyed, boyish looking man so attractive before.

"The fact is, Miss Clifton, our meeting here is not so much by chance as you may have supposed," Woods began as he threw himself down on the mossy turf before her under the giant oak, from whose great limbs high above them hung the grape-vine which Angenette had appropriated for a swing. "I merely followed the instincts of my soul and the promptings of my heart which was calling loudly for you; I gave it free rein, knowing that if I followed I should find you. I knew you must be near just now when it beat so vehemently, for you attract me like the positive pole of a magnet attracts the negative one; my soul has such an affinity for yours that I am thus drawn to you helplessly, and with no volition on the part of my will, but which is far from being rebellious at such times."

For answer Angenette laughed a clear burst of girlish merriment. Then she dropped her head and said affably, after a pause:

"It is indeed, very kind of you to say such pretty things to me; I am sure I feel greatly flattered."

"You don't seem to feel the sincerity of my words. If you could know what a burning, bursting heart prompted their utterance, you would at least pity me," he said soberly.

"I can hardly believe I could inspire an expression of such sentiments in a man of your type, who could not as yet know much of me, of my moods, ambitions or my past life," she replied thoughtfully.

"I can read in your face all about you that is necessary for me to know. I hold that love is supreme, everything should be subservient to it. Where love rules it should be respected above all else and given free rein, for it is the greatest thing in the world. Is it not enough that I love you unqualifiedly, unreservedly?" he said, his eyes pleading anxiously, leaving his words dangling in the air.

For a time neither spoke, nor lifted their eyes.

Overhead a wood-pigeon called plaintively for its mate.

"Don't you hear that poor bird calling to the one it loves? He is merely expressing the hunger in his heart which is similar to that I feel," the man said, watching the girl breathlessly, who replied in a tantalizing way:

"Yes, but the one for whom he is pouring out his love-notes seems to silently ignore his pleading, which may be best—who knows?"

There was chagrin darkly stamped on Woods's face, a nervous twitching of the muscles about the corners of the mouth, and his eyes had a suspicion of anxiety in them.

"What must I do to make you understand? Can't you see? Don't you realize how desperately I love you," he began in gushes of persuasive eloquence. "I have been seeking you all my life. I knew you were somewhere in the world. I felt your

unseen presence thrum upon the responsive strings of my heart, before my eyes were permitted to behold your matchless beauty. Now that I have found you, the flood-gates of my heart have been swept asunder by the uncontrollable tide of love which surges down the bed of my soul like the rush of a mighty river knowing no bounds. Without your love, my heart will be left dumb and barren to ache and break on the bleak shoals after the flood has shrunk away."

Angenette wondered at such eloquence from a man so apparently prosaic and practical. There are times in the lives of most men and women, too, when they are inspired to give an ornate setting and poetic expression to their unbridled feelings which beat vehemently against the lips for utterance.

"Then I am led to believe by such spontaneous flattery that I am your ideal," replied the fair brunette calmly.

"You are all that and more; you hold the key to my happiness—my destiny. Won't you—"

"Oh, don't let those words escape you; save yourself and me the pain and humiliation that could only result from what you are about to say; they can do no good, could not bring happiness to either of us; so they had better be left unsaid! Please, please do not force me to hurt your feelings. I don't want to do it; I have too much respect for you. I would not have your heart feel one single pang for me."

As Angenette said this they both arose, she leaning one hand back against the rough bark of the century-old tree forming the dark canopy overhead.

Woods caught her by the arm almost fiercely, and he shuddered as if in agony.

"Still I love you; I would compel you to speak. My heart demands an answer; it would know its fate now, but would break without your love! It were better that it beat on brokenly than to endure the horrible suspense it must know until you speak."

He had clasped her in his arms before she could offer resistance, holding his face close to hers over which wave after wave of the crimson tide within ebbed, spreading over her throat and to the edge of her hair. A little curl brushed his forehead, then rested against his cheek and burned into it like a coal of fire.

"No, no, you must not! This is ridiculous; it cannot be. I can't love you, neither can I tell you why, but it was never meant that we should be lovers," exclaimed Angenette somewhat excitedly as she drew away from him.

His arms fell and he turned away.

"You surely don't think you love me; why, we have been acquainted only such a short time. How can you feel that way? How could you expect me to say anything other than I have said? You should not blame me, really you should not. It was never meant that we should be anything more than friends," she continued seriously, and after a pause, added, her eyes averted, "I don't know why."

"I could see no reason for waiting longer. If I became convinced today that I loved you, why not tell you about it? If we have a feeling of love or hate, admiration or contempt for another, why not tell them? *Should they not know? I knew from*

the first that I loved you. Will you not yet say that you will be the guiding angel of my life?" said Woods, undaunted.

"No; there is a reason why I could not be your wife," she insisted. "It has always existed; its presence cannot be explained, but the fact remains, nevertheless."

"I will not take no for an answer; I will possess you!"

"Please go; we must not be together; I feel that it is wrong. We cannot always tell why we have certain feelings, why we like some or why we dislike others, but that is of little consequence. There are times when if the heart speaks, the tongue should be silent and the will passive.

"Are you going to turn me away so cruelly?"

"We must not be seen here in this manner," Angenette returned, repulsing his advance, made with both arms extended imploringly.

"Won't you reconsider?"

"No; this must all end here."

"May I not see you again?"

"This must be the end. Now go!"

"Give me a chance to prove that my love will last, will stand the test of time, will be faithful to you through all the years."

"It could not serve any purpose, would be useless, wasted. I know my heart and know that I do not love you and never could."

Then they started back through the forest toward the camp, Angenette leading the way, but neither spoke, and the boughs of the pine trees sighed *as they passed* beneath them.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN LOVE HAS WANED

Bernard Westbrook returned to St. Louis with the Wessex Club after the camping trip, although he had hoped to be able to remain longer in the Ozarks, but it was necessary for him to look after some important cases on the docket of the September term of circuit court. There were briefs to be prepared, arguments to be outlined, clients to confer with, witnesses to summon and many other minor details to dispose of, incident to the forthcoming session of court.

He had failed in an effort to arrange a heart to heart talk with Angenette Clifton, partly through lack of time and partly because Cornelia Burwell took advantage of every opportunity possible to keep them apart. In his brief leave-taking of Angenette he held her hand for a moment and fancied that he could see a look of pathetic wonder in her large inquiring eyes that struck deep into his soul. Although there was an attempt at coldness in his speech and an air of independent dignity in her manner, each believed that the other was acting a lie. After he had started to walk away, he suddenly turned as if he were about to address her, intending to learn the meaning of her seeming indifference, and at the same time make an honest confession of

all that was in his heart, but Cornelia observed this movement and hastened to prevent him from conferring with her rival further, by an apparently inadvertent but quite awkward intrusion.

With a low curtsy and a forced smile Westbrook turned away with a sadder heart than had ever before beaten within his bosom. How many lives are made desolate and how many paths diverge, never to come together again because a few simple words which may have trembled on the lips, were never uttered! Many are the lives that have been estranged by fate through a peculiar combination of circumstances, which, if each individual had understood, his heart would still continue to beat for the other. But often pride, modesty or jealousy, which is usually blind, fetters the tongue and seals the lips when the heart throbs for expression, leaving it to shrivel under its consuming fires. At last the hand of time covers the smoldering embers with gray ashes of remorse and congeals the tears of sympathy and regret that well up to the eyes to give vent to the pent up emotions within, but on the verge of expression were compelled to vanish unobserved and unappreciated, leaving the sad eyes to burn with silent grief.

Despite the intervention of Cornelia Burwell, Westbrook and Angenette could have told each other of their secret feelings, if they had really cared to do so. But each decided to wait for a more opportune time, which fact resulted in many weary days to both.

Westbrook's acquaintances among the members of the St. Louis bar wondered at the very marked change that had taken place in him. He lacked his old-time energy and tenacity. Flaws were found in his briefs; one of his cases was thrown out of court because it had not been properly drawn under the statutes governing such cases, a thing that had never before occurred in all his practice at the bar; clients upbraided him; his arguments were not as convincing as usual and his tediousness worried the court.

"What has come over you, old fellow?" an elderly attorney asked as he gave Westbrook a slap on the shoulder and looked at him inquiringly out of kindly eyes. "I would say that you were over-worked and needed a rest, but they tell me you have just returned from a summer's vacation in the mountains, so it must be something else; out with it, and maybe I can be of some assistance to you. Is it over a love affair? I should be surprised to learn that a man of your mettle would allow an affair of the heart to interfere with his business."

Westbrook had no plausible explanation to offer. He did not deign to paint for his solicitous friend the picture that rose constantly before him of an exquisitely beautiful brunette as she sat dreamily under the trailing honeysuckle and arbutus at her secluded home, or rode with easy and stately grace among the blue-rimmed Ozarks.

One morning as he sat in his office with a ponderous legal volume open on the table before him, but whose lines he could not see, for they were obscured by the sweet face of the one he loved which persisted

in coming between him and the page, leaving it blurred and unintelligible; Howard Woods entered, holding in his hand an envelope which bore the writing of a delicate hand.

"When have you heard from Angenette Clifton?" the visitor inquired before even formal greetings could be exchanged.

Westbrook, noting the troubled look in his eyes and his nervous manner, replied:

"Why do you ask? Has anything happened?"

"Well, yes, something that interests me vitally, and perhaps you, too."

"I have not been in communication with her since leaving the mountains," Westbrook finally said reflectively.

"Why don't you write to her? If you are not interested yourself, you owe it to her, for she should know whether you care for her or not."

"May I ask why I am the recipient of such kindly admonition?" Westbrook replied tersely.

"Well, it is this way: you see I did not know there had ever been anything between you and Miss Clifton, so believing that the field was clear for me, I at once told her of my desire to make her my wife, for after I saw her I grew more desperate about her every day. Finally I decided that I could not come back here without her. I tried to reason with myself, but the court was dominated by passion so reason was overruled. I threw discretion to the winds, forgot social position—everything—and told her of my love," Woods said excitedly.

Pausing a moment to glance at the letter, he resumed as Westbrook leaned forward interestedly:

"She refused, declaring that she had no love to offer me in exchange for that which I proffered. But when the club started home, I begged her again to consider the matter and she promised to write to me here.

" 'May I hope? Won't you give me the faintest promise of the answer that will fill my world with light?' I implored.

" 'No; I cannot;' was all she said. This is her letter, full of pity, tenderness, kindness, but lacking the one quality I most desired—hope," Woods said as he sank back into a chair and turned to the last page of the letter.

"Here is what she wrote:

" 'I feel that it would not be doing justice to you or to myself if I should give you my hand without my heart, and that seems impossible to do, since I have given my love to another, who, however, seems to have become somewhat indifferent to it. But I will go unloved to the grave if he does not reciprocate my affection. It may be there is a misunderstanding and all will come out right in the end, but whether it does or does not, I cannot be more to you than a friend!'

As Woods concluded reading the paragraph, Westbrook's face flushed a little and he said to himself:

"Can it be possible that she really loves me? I cannot think that it is anyone else. I will lose no time in finding out."

He reached into a drawer of a roll-top desk for stationery without saying a word to Woods and began to write.

"No, I will hear the truth from her own lips," he said under his breath as he tore the paper into bits and threw them into the wastebasket.

"I have since learned that you and Miss Clifton had been friends for some time, so I suppose that it is you she refers to in this letter; is it not?" asked Woods moodily.

"I am sure I should like to know," Westbrook replied evasively.

Westbrook had scarcely thought of Cornelia Burwell since his return from the Ozarks. He had felt for some time that his love for her, if indeed he could refer to his feelings toward her in such strong terms, was on the wane, in fact, he now knew that he had never loved her at all, arguing that it was nothing but admiration for her powers as a social leader and her ability to wield an influence over men with the skill of a sorceress; now even admiration had gone, leaving almost hate in its wake, for he had discovered the woman's true nature which was far from what he had at first supposed it to be.

"I will go to her at once and tell her that I am to be no more the plaything of her will; that our marriage is utterly unthinkable, and that from today we must go separate ways—let the result be what it may. I will marry the girl I love, even if she is poor and unknown and lives in the backwoods. These things will be no barrier, for love is my comforter, my all, and where love is, there is happiness always,

whether it be in a palace or a hovel," he said aloud after Woods had gone. He had never been able to understand how such an admirable character as Angenette Clifton could be a product of a rural community, a region far removed from modern civilization.

"That is not her place. She deserves a better fate. The blood of a prince must be in her veins, and I hope that some day she will come into her own. Without the training of a seminary or a university, she has an education that any girl might envy, and a native queenliness and graciousness of manner that stamps her as a personage fit to grace any court in Europe," he mused.

Cornelia Burwell's company was never really satisfying to Bernard Westbrook. He had professed an infatuation for her in his younger years, when to banish boredom he tried recourse to society, which he found hollow and unsatisfying, as is usually the case with a man of his temperament. For the same purpose—to rid themselves of a feeling of boredom—many men will seek various forms of dissipation, gaming, drinking, extravagance, excesses, which in their turn bring misery, remorse and ruin. He had learned that the highest pleasures are those of the intellect and the soul, and that it is useless to try to replace them with the fleeting pleasures of sense in which many indulge, lasting but a brief moment and gained at tremendous cost. He had found that the chief element in happiness was what a man had in himself.

When Westbrook called on Cornelia Burwell that evening, he found her in a mood that was not altogether pleasant, but she greeted him with a degree of cordiality. A month had passed and he had not called, indeed, he had only met her a few times quite by chance. She knew at once that a quarrel would be the result of their meeting, although she had never known him to give way to his baser nature in the presence of any woman. But she had some pointed things to say to him which he would doubtless resent. She was not sure that she would have the courage to say them, for she had found that she could not always say what she had carefully planned, at such times. Cornelia's disposition was, in the main, uniformly pleasant and agreeable to strangers, but a close study of her restless dark eyes showed that a dangerous fire slept far within their depths, and her cruel, half cynical lips often indicated that the demon anger did not always slumber in her bosom. Her early childhood had given promise of a woman with a most magnanimous nature, but she was perverted by unfortunate environments, which usually count for as much as heredity in the total results of character building.

"I had been wondering whether or not you would condescend to call again. Your time seems to have been pretty well taken up with your business affairs; my, how your practice has evidently grown of late!" she began with a note of raillery in her voice.

"Indeed, I might give many reasons for having neglected my social duties," replied Westbrook dryly.

"You do not seem to be as assiduous in your at-

tentions to your bride-to-be as one might expect. I am afraid one of your indifferent disposition would forget he had a wife before love's young honeymoon was old," she said waspishly. But this assumed attitude of defiance soon changed when Westbrook began to tell her of the purpose of his call. He said:

"Seeing that our dispositions are so much at variance, I hardly think it wise or prudent to talk further of any marriage contract between us. I am sure you will acquiesce in this, if you look at the matter rightly and from my viewpoint."

The paleness in Cornelia's cheeks was accentuated as she felt, with a sharp agony, his words sink into her soul, and her voice had a hint of huskiness in it when she replied:

"What have I done to be thus cast aside; and who are you to thus flatter yourself by thinking you can do so without first consulting my feelings regarding the matter?"

"You know we seldom wed those whom we first love," Westbrook said as he sighed reminiscently, then added, "and we should never wed those whom we do not love."

"You will find that some women are not composed of the fiber that bends easily," she retorted, her cheeks aglow with a flame as bright as that held by the sumac leaves in November.

Westbrook took the threat to mean that he could not force her to his will. Such a course is a hazardous undertaking in dealing with any woman, but persuasion, if persistent and properly applied, seldom fails of its purpose.

"She may possibly mean to try and hold me by law to my promise, merely through spite," he said under his breath.

"Some there are who are selfish enough and wicked enough to trifle with the heart and sacrifice it on the altar of love, blinded for the moment by a false sense of their own innate rights," he replied as he toyed abstractedly with the fringe of a portiere.

"Have you never heard that revenge is sweet, and that some women will undergo suffering if thereby they are able to prevent someone who has incurred their displeasure from obtaining the happiness for which he longs?" volunteered Cornelia sneeringly.

"I have also heard that if one should treat some women as if they were as devoid of reason as parrots they would worship you," said Westbrook, his face remaining calm and passive.

Her eyes rested scornfully upon him, but all the flippancy was gone from her voice when she said :

"God help and pity me ; I must suffer like the rest, I suppose, for we women cannot choose our lot."

"You can at least assist in averting a calamity befalling two, or perchance, many lives, by taking a sensible view of things instead of acting from spiteful motives, which invariably acts as a boomerang and often brings misery to all concerned."

Westbrook's steady blue eyes looked fixedly at Cornelia. Her well poised head, abundantly crowned with wavy black hair, turned sharply, her face indexing the feelings in her heart as she said :

"I hope there is a pleasure to be derived from the actions of those men who deliberately trample upon

a woman's affections, thinking she has nothing else to do but to forget and to love again just as ardently as before. Such love may be mistaken for selfishness or spitefulness, but when we love and lose, all is lost. Never again will the world seem quite the same. The same sun may shine and the same stars may glow, but they will look mockingly at us; the flowers we admired may bloom as before, but their perfume will be freighted with memories of something—the essence of all our happiness—which we know will never come again. The same breezes of summer may blow, but they will bring to us only dirges from the land of burial, damp and low, where love's tomb was made, and the only response in the strings of the harp of our being in future years will be a wail—the pitiable discord of the sprightly music of yesterday when every chord was instinct with love.”

Her eyes stared moodily and for a time the stillness was unbroken.

“I think we had better come to an understanding at once,” said Westbrook in a business-like way. “It is useless to prolong this farce. Love is too sacred to be trifled with. It is now clear to my mind that if any love ever existed between us, it has ceased to dominate us—it has withered away owing to lack of fuel. Then if it is dead, why not bury it? Should not the past take it to its kindly tomb of oblivion, and if we have been mistaken in deeming that it ever existed, then desist from longer deceiving ourselves?”

Cornelia sat in silent contempt for some time before she vouchsafed a reply, which was an evasion of the real question, she being apparently unwilling to discuss pointedly a matter which she did not wish settled and dismissed.

"That girl in the Ozarks—do you love her?"

"If so, I should deem it best to tell her first."

"Then you do love her; I thought so all the time. You, Bernard Westbrook, with your exalted birth, your record of honor, your position in fashionable society, your high education, to so much as dare to notice a plain unknown daughter of a mountaineer, especially after you had won the love of another. What an insane act! How preposterous! How awful! How terrible!"

In this manner she gave vent to her clearly expressed disdain, arose from her seat, and, folding her arms across the piano, buried her face in them and sobbed audibly.

Westbrook could not think that such feelings resulted from wounded affections, but rather from wounded pride. She could not take defeat calmly. She had so long molded the actions of men to conform to her will that she had begun to regard her powers over those with whom she had dealings as well nigh supreme and invincible. Evidences of fickleness, of questionable character and coldness of disposition she had frequently displayed of late which led Westbrook to believe that in reality he could not rightly claim a deeper place in her affections than could many another. While he was always open to conviction, his opinions could seldom be

warped when he finally decided that he was right, so there was not to be any retraction that night.

"She does not care for me so much as she would lead me to believe; besides my heart hungers for another, so why not go ahead?" Westbrook admitted to himself as Cornelia, who had put away her tears, turned facing him, and he could not help evincing some feeling for her as he looked into the troubled melancholy depths of her eyes as she sighed resignedly:

"Why must some hearts have to suffer and break, sacrifice their all upon the altar of pain, while others beat on in pleasure, seldom darkened by a shadow? I do not know; I hope to be given strength somehow to bear it, but I will never forget, neither forgive," she said impressively with white lips and averted eyes.

"I am sorry to cause you any sufferings, but seeing that it must come sometime, one way or another, it had as well manifest itself now as later, before it is too late, so, good-by," he said, extending his hand good naturedly, and passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

Night had settled over the mountains, still and dark, for black, ominous looking shapes of vapor with ragged edges slowly drifted across the sky threateningly. Only a few stars were visible between rifts in the clouds, and there was no moon, when the ponderous old stage-coach gained the summit of the ridge from which the flickering yellow lights of the little town of Forsyth, the most important business center of that section of the Ozarks, could be seen blossoming like flowers through the dark, far below in the valley, where nestled cosily the scattered weather-beaten houses constituting the town. The fitful gleam from the furnace of a saw-mill played upon the ever-changing surface of White River, and with the exception of the intermittent bark of dogs answering each other through the darkness, no sound arose from the valley. The driver, a picturesque mountaineer, urged his four-horse team down the last long incline that led to the town, with many a boisterous oath and crack of his long whip.

Bernard Westbrook was the only passenger, and the long, rough mountain road had worried him, for he was impatient to reach his destination. As he lounged carelessly on the rear seat, but few words passed between him and Alec Erbo, the

driver, who sat high above on the front of the coach. Erbo's naturally ill-tempered disposition became more expressive from the fact that the loosening of a bolt and the consequent breaking of a rod under the coach had necessitated mending the break by binding a hickory stick to the rod with a bridle rein until a blacksmith could be found, causing a delay which resulted in part of the drive having to be made after dark.

"Fact is, mister," the driver began, as he leaned over on his seat until his broad sombrero, around which had been fastened a big leather band with large, shining brass buckles, was visible at the side entrance to the coach, "I ain't 'specially afeard to drive through these mountings a'ter dark, but I'd a leetle ruther not do hit. I don't mean ter skeer yo', but fact is, this yere kentry is th' stompin' ground fer some purty tough citenzens. I ain't heerd that they've done no robbin' yit, but they do a lot o' other things, allers a'ter dark, that ain't very pleasant ter think about, sich ez takin' a feller out thet they've got a spite ag'inst an' givin' him a good whoopin, but I don't 'zactly like the idee uv bein' 'sponsible fer all the mail and express that is brung in here—thet I don't nuther."

"I hope the citzens you refer to are not highwaymen who will molest us. Doubtless we will get to Forsyth without any trouble after all," replied Westbrook, reassuringly.

"Yo' never kin tell whut sich fellers ez them pesky galoots will git in theyr heads ter do. Say, if you've got a gun, yo' wouldn't mind helpin' a

feller out if they did jump us, I reckon? I've got a couple o' purty good shootin' irons here myself, an' I ain't much uv a bragger, but I'm supposed ter be kindo handy with 'em, too, when it's necessary."

"I should very much regret being involved in an affray with such characters as you have intimated might be found in these parts, but I hope to be able to defend myself in case of an emergency."

"Waal, jist thought I'd tell yo', case anything turned ep, so ez yo' wouldn't be taken by s'prise," said Alec.

They rode on in silence for a short distance through the Ulm woods, when just as the foremost lead horse swung around a sharp curve in the road, two men stepped out from behind a bush, causing the horses to shy, one of the animals giving a snort. The driver was on the alert, and, quickly wrapping the lines around the brake, covered each of the men with a big revolver. Only one of them exhibited firearms; the other stood at the heads of the team in front.

"'Pears like I've got the drap on you fellers this time, so I 'low ez how ye'd better hike back to the woods er they'll be some shootin'. Keep them hands down, fer these guns o' mine hev hair-triggers an' they mout go off 'fore I knowed it," said Alec in a calm, matter-of-fact voice that betokened a steady nerve.

"I only wanted a little information from you, sir, and none of your money or blood, so put up your pistols and tell me what I want to know, and we'll let you go on with your old lumber-wagon,"

the man standing near the coach said with a calmness more than half assumed.

"Don't seem ter me like you've got anything ter do with my goin' on—yo' talk mouty sassy 'bout whut I'm ter do."

"Well, I didn't know but there was a man in the coach whom I wanted to see—that was all."

"Ain't got no man 'tall in thar, but ef I did you'd not see him. Now, I cac'late ez how hit's time for yo' damned gazabos ter clear away from yere, so let loose of that bridle or I'll put six holes in yer pesky hide in less time than hit takes ter tell yo' 'bout hit."

Seeing that the driver had the advantage and fearing that further parley might result disastrously, the intruder refrained from his desire to look inside the coach to make sure that the man he wanted was not there, and ordered his accomplice to permit the horses to proceed.

The coach rumbled on down the road and soon reached the outskirts of the town. Neither of the men said anything for some time. Finally the driver spoke:

"Cum purt nigh gitin' into hit, didn't we?" But he did not know how he had narrowly averted a tragedy by his coolness and bravery, for Westbrook, who had remained silent during the talk with the intruders, with his revolver drawn and pointing directly at the one nearest the coach, did not mention the fact that he was evidently the man whom they sought, and having frequently heard the voice of the spokesman, could not be mistaken as to whose it was—Wade Drexel's.

"Wunder who they's a'lookin' fer? Guess hit warn't yo', mister—some feller they had a spite ag'inst, I reckon," said Alec.

The driver drew up his reins in front of the Black Eagle hotel to allow his passenger to alight before he delivered the mail and express packages farther on down the narrow, winding and dimly lighted street.

Westbrook did not take kindly to the prospects, for he had hoped to reach Forsyth early enough to be driven on to the club-house that night. Now his only choice was to remain there until the following morning, for it was not only difficult to secure transportation at that hour, but he hardly cared to risk another meeting with his enemies. After engaging a room for the night, he ate a much-relished meal, although it was not served to his liking, but the trip and the excitement of the day had left him hungry, and now a suggestion of weariness had begun to creep over him. He walked out onto the long porch to the end near the street where he found a rustic-chair by the woodbine, which clambered up the lattice, the vine now somewhat withered from the recent frosts.

He smoked a cigar leisurely and thoughtfully for some time, although he was far from being composed. He had been troubled so much by his old antagonist and hated rival that he had begun to detest Drexel rather than fear him, for he believed that he could hold his own with the ruffian unless unfair and treacherous methods were resorted to by the young Bald Knobber. He had not

expected to meet Drexel in the vicinity of Forsyth, for the desperado lived near Iron Knob, many miles north of there. How he had suspected that Westbrook might be on the coach that night was a mystery to the club-man.

"I am not going to take any more chances with him. I really ought to have shot him down like the miserable cur that he is, when I had the opportunity tonight, because of his dastardly attempt at my life on the river last summer, but I detest such cowardly methods. I believe in meeting a man face to face on equal footing. I wish I could see him. I would talk to the villain straight from the shoulder and warn him to keep out of my affairs," he said, swayed by the feeling of resentment he felt for Drexel.

Westbrook rose and restlessly paced the narrow porch, indifferent to the few stragglers who passed by along the street, his thoughts divided between the indignities he had been subjected to and his forthcoming meeting with Angenette Clifton, the outcome of which was uncertain. He could not remember when he had been so torn by such a dark mood. He wheeled suddenly and entered the small, dimly-lighted and somewhat isolated office of the Black Eagle hotel, scarcely noticing a half-sprawling form leaning upon the little table in the opposite corner, supposing that the man was a guest of the house and intoxicated or half asleep. Upon a closer examination, he discovered that it was Drexel, who had evidently just recently entered by the side door.

When he saw this wretch, whose young life was now a misery to him for the unlawful secrets he carried, Westbrook drew his revolver and deliberately walked across the room to within a few feet of the Bald Knobber before attracting his attention.

Drexel started, reaching for his revolver while attempting to rise, apparently half dazed. Soon he realized his position, for his evil, blood-shot eyes met Westbrook's cold, piercing look, which never wavered, and noted that a long-barreled revolver, held by a steady hand, was pointed at his head. He looked at the club-man in open-eyed amazement and laughed a bitter, ironical, despairing travesty of mirth; then a harassed expression settled upon his face. He had always regarded Westbrook as a coward and lacking both nerve and fighting qualities unless aroused to self-defense, consequently he was surprised at this advance.

"Place your hands upon the table and keep them there, you groveling cur, and if you so much as move a muscle I will empty this revolver into your whisky-besotted body. I will take no chances with your treachery, for you have tried to take my life already and would gladly do so again—you dastard!" exclaimed Westbrook, whose words lashed the other into fury.

"Well, what the hell do you want, anyway?" said Drexel, who was thus duped by a clever stratagem, as the cynic in him began to make grimaces, and all sorts of horrid thoughts capered through his brain.

"I want to know what your object was in stopping the coach in the Ulm woods a few hours ago and inquiring about some passenger—evidently me—don't deny it, for I knew your voice?" said Westbrook, who, with tight-set lips, turned resolutely toward the opposite side of the little table at which Drexel still sat with the lamplight falling piteously upon his pale, worn features and crafty eyes, which followed closely every movement of the blue-steel revolver.

"I didn't want to see you about anything. Did I ask for you?" Drexel said, insolently, in a low, tense voice, his face growing white with anger at the taunt.

"I would advise you to answer me guardedly—I am in no mood to be trifled with by such as you," said the other, with an expressive gesture.

Drexel reddened and glanced up with a furtive look of fear, as he nodded, swore and nodded again.

"Why do you sneak along after me everywhere I go?"

Drexel stirred apprehensively.

"Answer, you rogue!" Westbrook called out his strident command.

"I never followed you anywhere," denied Drexel, finally.

"You lie; you have been hounding me from the very first time we met."

Drexel only laughed at him, the veritable laugh of a maniac. Then he tried to speak unconcernedly, but the white, drawn look about the mouth indicated that concern had taken the place of surprise in his voice as he said:

"It was only by accident that I happened to be around where you were so much, but I usually go wherever I take a fancy without asking any one whether it suits them or not. I don't see why it should concern you where I go."

"You will find out how much it concerns me if you attempt to further molest me, you baseborn outlaw," said Westbrook, as he met Drexel's glance with a thoughtful, self-involved and retrospective eye. Then a sudden storm of passion swept over the latter and shook him as the wind shakes a weed, and he pulled himself up with a vicarious resentment as he flashed:

"I'll follow you wherever and whenever I damned please—what are you going to do about it?"

"Fill you full of lead like I would a dog."

Drexel again flared up indignantly and unwaveringly looked his opponent in the eye while he said, with a slight tremor in his voice:

"There's a party of moonshiners in the mountains around where you have been making yourself obnoxious, who are planning to take care of you if you are seen prying around any more, so I predict that you'll get what's coming to you all right whether I have the pleasure of taking a part in the affair or not. I would advise you to make tracks out of this valley and stay where you belong; your place is evidently not in this part of the state, for many reasons."

Westbrook turned upon him a most withering look as he said:

"None of your suggestions, or contemptible insinuations, or you will not live to take a hand in carrying out the plans of your law-defying friends, or to incite any man or set of men to force my exit from this country, which I am positive you have already been doing," which assertion was unquestionably true.

Westbrook was now not only sustained by his courage, but also by his hatred.

"I don't know of anybody in these regions that is afraid of a city dude or his whole gang," Drexel muttered thickly in a strain of facetious sarcasm.

"Neither do I know of any one here of whom I am afraid, and if it would interest you to know, I will say that I will not be scared out of these mountains—I intend to stay until I get fully ready to go. The fact that you and your gang are not pleased because of my presence here, will have nothing to do with the alteration of my original plans," Westbrook insisted naively. His enemy, who had sullenly and obstinately sat warily watching with the cunning of a savage every movement of the man who pointed the ready revolver at him, had hoped at last for an opportunity to get revenge, but his steady glances out of treacherous eyes were too apparent to the young attorney, who had seen too many criminals to be deceived at such a time.

"Don't you think I ought to kill you right here and now? Don't you deserve to be shot after your dastardly attempt to stab me a few weeks ago down on the river?" asked Westbrook, incisively.

"I thought you were somebody else. I have never wanted to kill you," replied the other with mock calmness, but with dancing eyes, as he sat, tense and rigid with excitement, expectancy, incredulity.

"If you want to live, you are to beg my pardon for such a cravenly act and also promise me that you will never again interfere with my going or coming, and finally that you will desist from further annoying Angenette Clifton. What do you say?" urged Westbrook with imperious finality; then took a step forward and stood waiting with a breathless avidity of expectation.

"Oh, to hell with you; I'll never do it! Who do you think I am? You haven't the nerve to kill me; you can shoot and be damned!" the Bald Knobber retorted, obstinately, after he had attempted to reach his right hip where his big revolver was shoved into its holster, but the click of the hammer on Westbrook's pistol sounded warningly in his ears and he drew up his hand without it. He slammed his fist down upon the table with a crash and subsided, breathing hard and muttering incoherently, as lines of pain and rage formed in his face.

Then both men were startled by a crash which jarred the door open. Westbrook's revolver was knocked from his hand and exploded. Bullets crashed through the lamp, which stood on a shelf by the window. Several shots were fired simultaneously. Bits of flying window-panes were scattered over the floor. There was a succession of pe-

culiar whistles near the door, a sudden trampling of hurrying feet on the walk outside the hotel, while Westbrook retreated to one corner of the room and turned the table so that it would screen him from the flying bullets, which were noisy above.

When the firing ceased there was the sound of running feet receding down the board walk beyond the Black Eagle hotel, and soon stillness reigned again.

It was some time before Westbrook realized just what had happened, but suddenly it dawned upon him that his rival's friends had discovered Drexel's predicament and took such a course to rescue him. He believed the shattering of the little lamp which rendered the room totally dark, was alone responsible for his escape from assassination.

The next morning blood was found on the floor and in frequent drops along the board walk in the direction taken by Drexel and his rescuers.

CHAPTER XVI

AN AUTUMN WALK

It was one of those rare days that shed such splendor on the fading leaf in the Ozarks. The air had that soft and mellow tone which belongs to the ideal October weather, for the afternoon was perfect. The beauty of the autumn woods in southwestern Missouri is too gorgeous for any attempt at description. Each acre of woodland is a panorama of glory incomparable with any other picture that nature has painted for the delight of the eye and soul of man. What magical alchemy of earth, air and sunlight that creates this marvelous beauty of the dying leaf! No wonder that poetic fancy has always peopled the forest with fairies, whose subtle hands in autumn paint all the trees in gold and scarlet. It is one of nature's inscrutable paradoxes that such bewitching beauty as this should be also the herald of decay and death. It is the consciousness that all this charm of color that now fondly lingers on the woodlands, this glory of sky and sweetness of air, will soon vanish like a creation of magic, that makes one drink in more eagerly the intoxication of these fleeting days. Nothing is more mysterious than the passing of this autumnal carnival. Flora closes her reign in this region with the most lavish and regal splendors, but when the magnifi-

cent pageant is over, gloom and desolation all too quickly usurp the vacant throne of the vanished queen. The court of enchantment revels for a few brief days and then the spell of beauty is gone, leaving no trace upon the disrobed groves and gray fields of the golden, dreamy hours that dallied so lovingly with the ripening leaf.

Why does not the feverish heart of the busy, weary world seek more respite from life's daily toils and cares in the calm and restful woods? Truly the groves are temples where man may worship, and in communion with the autumn woods the mind may learn some lessons of humility and reverence. The poets of old saw in the sear and yellow leaf the fittest symbol of man's fleeting years, and to him who treads the solemn, rustling aisles of the majestic sylvan cathedrals each sigh of the October breeze as it caresses the tinted foliage whispers a message of gentle admonition. In the autumn woods the heart forgets its worldly pride and greed and yields pensively to the sad, sweet music of the passing season.

Autumn in the Ozarks! The phrase has many meanings to many minds, but they are all more or less connected with multitudinous choirs of black-birds singing merrily in yellowing walnut trees of the woods-pastures, with quarreling bluejays and woodpeckers, with chattering squirrels hoarding up their winter supply of acorns, with the deep purple haze that lies soft on the long, low hills and more stately mountains, vistas of brown corn-shocks between which huge pumpkins wallow and bask in the

sunshine in countless fields, and a general sense of bounty and fruition. Truly a glorious season, the Missouri fall. Bounteous the gift of her soil, and richly her people reap. With the first days of autumn, in ten thousand orchards the biggest and reddest apples in the world turn crimson cheeks to the sun; in ten thousand vineyards big, purple grapes hang in inviting abundance; and in ten thousand fields the huskers whistle at their task, alone but not lonely, for sadness is unknown when nature does her best in the Ozark autumn.

As the days go by the purple haze on the hills deepens, and the red and yellow leaves of the trees add a dash of color that is heightened here and there by the crimson flame of the Virginia creeper. Nature has added the matron's beauty to her bounty, and none regret the passing of the year's youth, for in this favored region she uses her brush lavishly in displaying her wondrous tints on oak, walnut and sassafras, but she looks to the maple for the complete realization of her autumnal color scheme. Much of the splendor of the autumn forests is due to the brilliancy of the sugar-maple. This splendid forest tree, perhaps the finest on the continent, grows along the winding streams of the Ozarks, too few, for it never fails in the spectacular demands of autumn, but glows in red and crimson, and flames in yellow that deepens to orange. Sometimes a single branch will turn scarlet, while its fellows remain green. The maples do not always wait for frost. They complete their work and then they hasten forward almost precipitately with the process

of defoliation. The leaves go through their gorgeous changes and then fall off without the compulsion of winter's approach. In this they are unlike the human heart, which must feel the stinging but purifying touch of grief's frosty finger before it yields and consents to add its wealth of kindness and tenderness to the dark world around it, and make more radiant with its rarest golden possessions the saddened homes of men.

After the first frost has come and the leaves have assumed their last brave show of color before yielding to the inevitable wintry air, over on the sheltered hillside, just below the maze of underbrush, and just beyond the widening creek, bends the low broad-leaved papaw with its burden of luscious fruit, and along the outskirts of the woods and the open glades stand persimmon trees heavily laden with their delicious offerings.

One by one in the profound hush of the frosty air at dawn, is heard the crash of nuts through the leaves of tall hickories, falling with a dull thud upon cabin roof or cattle-shed.

During the autumn days in the Ozarks, how pleasant it is to walk abroad amid such Edenic loveliness, to bathe the brow in the pulsing waves of warmth and freshness, to drink the elixir of the air until the heart is enraptured! How enchanting to feel the spell of the unseen wizard that tints the wild grape, turning its emerald to amethyst, transforming the clambering vines to festoons of gold and turning the sumac berries to blood red torches that light the melancholy gloom in the forest's moldering

halls—the taciturn wizard who detaches the glossy chinquapins and brown buckeyes and flings them to the tawny carpet below—a veritable Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Surrounded by such luxuriant splendor, two lovers wandered forth, and gave themselves up to the glory around them. Their hearts were for a time too full for speech, but they looked into each other's eyes and the world was forgotten—for they understood. Such supernal beauty was a tonic to their souls which were attuned to the finer harmonies of nature. When two hearts are thus fused together by so strong an affinity, is it not strange that it is only for a brief time that forgetfulness reigns, and that memory so soon permits the stern realities of life to step in and mar the ideal?

On such a day and amid such scenes Bernard Westbrook told Angenette Clifton of a love that would never fail, and she, then in her youth and beauty's richest glow, professed an affection that equalled his.

He had returned to the Ozarks without advising her of his coming. His meeting with Drexel in Forsyth made him more determined than ever to win her, for with him love thrived best, as it usually does, upon opposition.

Taking the trail over Panther Ridge, he swung into the wood-path that wound along the banks of the Little Blue, eventually leading into a narrow ravine that lay only a short distance from the Clifton home.

"I will go direct to my forest sanctuary, for on an afternoon like this she will evidently be there," he said, remembering how she delighted to repair with a favorite book to the old sandstone by the fern-covered spring, and while away the sunny hours.

Disappointment for a time overshadowed him when he discovered that she was not there, but his heart beat faster as he stood alone with bared head, recalling all that had transpired at this place upon former meetings. How vividly those pleasant pictures of other days came back to him—her every word and look; and how very lonesome and dreary the place seemed without the sunshine of her face and the merry ring of her laughter! A wonderful thrill swept through him and he seemed to feel her gentle presence near, again brought back by the psychological law of association of ideas. Then through his brain a thought flashed brightly, bringing hope.

"I cannot believe that she does not think of those times and of me when she revisits this spot so hallowed to my memory. I must know the cause for this apparent estrangement, and I will never cease to believe that I have dwelt within her heart and that I am welcome to return there, until she tells me with her own lips that I have been deluded. I must hear the story from her. I will not depend upon outward appearances or the opinions of others, who, in trying to interfere in such matters, invariably have some ulterior motive. I know that if she once cared for me, she must yet have a spark of affection some-

where in the dark recesses of her heart, which I must again fan into flame," Westbrook reasoned, looking carefully around. Thus vagrant hope sometimes may happily light the vacant chambers of the darkened mind just as a stray starbeam will often chance to find its way through realms of the thickest night. Then some afterthought brought back the shadow that had left his face; he shook his head with the calmness of despair and stood silently, lost in contemplation. He strolled up the path for a short distance and when he lifted his eyes Angenette was watching him earnestly. He started, halted, hesitated and looked with a mingling of admiration, love and compassion upon the somewhat forlorn figure, standing serenely before him. In the glance of each was the same quality of curiosity.

The pretty speech he had planned to say when they should meet, he could not recall except in meaningless fragments—it drifted away evasively; but when the girl's face lighted with enthusiasm and her eyes began to glisten as she saw his drift, she gave a little laugh of conscious vantage, but at the same time with a manner of gracious courtesy and appreciation, and she betrayed a feeling of relief, for Westbrook's live and persuasive style soon returned and she felt her heart flutter under his sincere words of admiration for which she thanked him in a steady dispassionate way.

"It is quite by chance that we meet here again in your favorite haunt—and, allow me to add—mine also. I hope we were drawn here by the same impulses, but I scarcely dare to hope that you were

prompted by the same desires as was I, which I trust you will kindly permit me to make known," he said faintly with a lamentable attempt at ease and assurance. Yet there was that in his voice which told her everything, before she could put in a tranquilizing word her lips had framed. She only flushed; her eyes shone with tenderness and affection; a slight smile hovered in the corners of her mouth, but she did not speak.

"You perhaps know already why I have come," resumed Westbrook as they walked down the little wood-path together, past the forest sanctuary, as he was always pleased to refer to the big boulder at the spring, and on down the banks of the brooklet to the Little Blue which now bore on its restless bosom bright autumn leaves in a hundred fleets of golden galleons, which maneuvered awhile, then sailed swiftly away. "I want to make an honest confession, to tell you the truth about something which I hope concerns you, but which I should be grieved to know had caused you any worry, and I also want to clearly understand whether I have any claim on your affections. I am speaking frankly, I know, but I have been so torn in feelings over it all that I am thus compelled to give expression to them without further effort at concealment. I cannot restrain my tongue from admitting the whole truth, after which I hope to feel relieved. Won't you hear me, realizing that our hearts may lose tomorrow what our hands may hold today, and that time will often drown the vows of love with sighs of regret? So how will you ever know if you will not hear me now?"

Angenette glanced at him with a meditating tilt of her fluffy head, looking alluringly sweet, and he felt a strange emotion sweep over him as he saw a pair of suffused, dark, pansy-like eyes looking up at him appealingly.

"Dearest, this is one of those rare moments to me which seem too bright to belong to earth, but which has strayed down from Eternity," he said in broken words.

"I have loved you all the time, although you doubted me. But I do not think it strange, for you could not know and did not understand. I might have had some feeling for the one you suspected of having a right to claim my affection, long ago, before I saw you, but that is now settled and forgotten. Cornelia Burwell forced me to treat her as I did in your presence, but God knows how I suffered because of it. Could you not read the pain in my face? Did you not know even then how I longed for you instead? I hope you did not let her poison your mind against me through the many ways she invented to do so, and that it is all over now. I want you to know that I bring to you the first grand passion of my life to lay on the altar before you. Is there anything to prejudice you against me? Is there not still a spark of love in your heart for the man who now worships you?" said the young attorney, feeling his way along guardedly.

"I have nothing of bitterness in my heart for you, but there was pain when I thought that you did not care," Angenette said, after a pause, with face averted. Then a sudden blush suffused her cheeks *and sudden* tears rose to her eyes.

They had reached a secluded, mossy nook where Beaver Creek mingles its waters with the Little Blue, and there, surrounded by a sylvan magnificence that made the place seem enchanted, they sat on the banks of the beautiful stream and Westbrook resumed the story of his love which Angenette secretly rejoiced to hear, for it came direct but unpremeditated from the heart of a man with the soul of a poet.

“Your every sigh, bringing with it undoubted evidence of your regard for me, added to my dreams of you, who in all the world I love the best, has shaken my being to the profoundest depths. I have been like one bereft of reason, and have known no peace since I last saw you. I have longed to possess you, with a desire that no argument could refute, although reason has come to me and said that it could not be. My heart demands, why not? and refuses to be comforted. The days when I was not permitted to see you seemed to hang on with the length of perpetual winters, and filled me with wildest vagaries, although I realized that my love for you must undergo that trial of separation in the crucible of temporary despair that it might be freer from dross when the hour arrives, if indeed, I may hope for such bliss, when our lives shall be fused together as one. Madness almost seizes me when I think that it may never be; that fate may interpose and take you from me—you, born to be my bride; you, to whom I look with the same eager hope that men look to the Christ for salvation! You are the source of all that is worth while in this world; the current of my whole being sets to you like a wild

mountain torrent seeking the peaceful sea ; and aside from you and your love, the things that earth holds are but incidents of little importance, being valued to me only in so far as they may serve me in bringing to you the delights of life, for I love you as man never loved woman before. My love for you shall always be heavenly, for it is an inspiration from God—pure and high. So, dearest, won't you trust me with the treasure of your heart?"

A shower of leaves, red and yellow, were seized and carried away by a wanton breeze, laden with spicy forest odors. They drifted down from the trees overarching the scene, a splendid artist's dream, and fell silently upon the stream where they loitered for a moment as if reluctant to leave the beautiful nook, and then were borne slowly away, forming a royal thread of crimson and gold, which passed at last out of sight.

When Westbrook had finished they both arose, Angenette trembling with emotion. He clasped her in his arms and said huskily, almost in agony, as he felt her lithe form sway with the tumultuous ecstasy that swept over her :

"I love you! I love you! What more can I say?"

Angenette looked down the valley of the winding stream with eyes that did not see what lay before them. Then she raised her face to his, but could say no word, and he crushed a passionate kiss upon her rose-petaled mouth.

So they were betrothed.

CHAPTER XVII

A NARROW ESCAPE

While walking along the banks of White River with his gun thrown across his arm, Bernard Westbrook, who had spent the day hunting deer on Swan Creek and Iron Knob, was returning to the club-house which was yet several miles away. The river was already shadowed in some places by the towering bluffs which skirted its shores on the west, when, suddenly peering up the stream with his hand shading his eyes, he saw a golden-haired young woman making frantic efforts to force a canoe from its mooring. The current was so swift that she made slow progress and could get only a short distance from the bank. She was startled when she heard the crack of a dead stick which the huntsman stepped upon when directly opposite her.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Westbrook? I thought I was quite alone here and I was frightened when I heard you coming," said the fair rower as she glanced sharply up at him, laughing discordantly. She was partly screened from the man's view by the low shrubbery which grew between him and the water's edge, but Westbrook knew from her peculiar accent that it was Bessie Ellsworth.

"I don't seem to be very proficient in handling the oars today. I did not know that I had forgotten how, but it is so swift here," she said with a mingled look of fear and embarrassment.

"You seem to be going on a camping trip, judging from the outfit in the stern of your canoe. Why are you alone in such an unfrequented place?" demanded Westbrook somewhat brusquely.

The girl hesitated and replied confusedly:

"Oh, I am just taking a little trip and I knew I would need a few things before I got back. There was no one to come with me and I thought I could row across the river myself. Some one is to meet me down at the point near Windy Pass, if I can only get there."

The huntsman-attorney, who had been accustomed to gaining almost any information he desired from anyone whom he wished to cross-question, having examined scores of unwilling witnesses in different courts, knew at once that Bessie was, at least, evading the whole truth.

"Who is to meet you, and where are you then going, may I ask?"

"Just a mutual friend of ours who will escort me—to—to a relative's beyond Rocky Canyon where I intend visiting a while."

"I understand."

"You won't mention to Angenette the fact that you met me here, will you?" Bessie said entreatingly.

"No, I hardly suppose that would be necessary, but why don't you want her to know?"

"Oh, it is just a little secret that I had rather keep hidden from her for a while—I want to surprise her—just a whim of mine, I suppose, but you won't mind to humor me in this by complying to my wish, I know."

"But don't you think I had better row you across the river, if you must go? I am afraid for you to attempt the treacherous current alone; you might not be able to guide the boat to the place where you wish to land, besides the rapids are not so very far away."

Bessie flushed, but her eyes shone with courage and resolve. Finally she consented to this plan, and Westbrook took the oars, she seating herself in the stern of the boat, facing him, while his gun was placed in the bow. Soon the boat got well under way and gained the middle of the stream.

"Now, fair pilot, what course do we take? I am putting explicit faith in you as commander in this somewhat extraordinary expedition, which we must conduct with minute care or failure, and possibly disaster will result."

The girl smiled wanly.

Just as the boat-head rounded the first turn in the river, the two occupants were hailed by a man passing up the bank on the same side from which they had set out.

They could not distinctly understand the fragments of speech that came to them, for a breeze drove the words back toward the man who uttered them, but the sight of him caused a strange feeling to pass over both the man and the girl in the

boat, for they at once recognized Wilfred Clifton, who was also returning from a deer hunt; they knew that he recognized them and that Angenette would be duly advised of what he had seen. She would evidently be in a bad mood until an explanation was forthcoming.

"Now, something will have to be told. How am I to clear myself and at the same time guard your secret as I have promised? What will Angenette think of us both? You know her suspicious nature will be sure to gain the mastery over her reasoning faculties until she may imagine various kinds of absurdities," began Westbrook as an odd, harassed look came into his eyes.

"Oh, tell her—we were—were—well, tell her anything; but don't let her inform my parents."

"Why, don't they know where you are going?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, but they will wonder why you were rowing me across the river—you see I don't want to get you into any trouble."

"You are very kind, I am sure, to be so solicitous about my welfare, but don't you think it is likely to be you that will need the most sympathy, after all?"

Bessie paled a little at this, wondering if he could guess her secret. Then the ghost of a fear hovered near her and she felt her heart sink, but made no reply. Meanwhile depression seized upon her, and her mouth drooped at the corners with a dainty suggestion of pathos.

As the boat neared the little promontory opposite Windy Pass on the rugged cedar covered mountain

to the west, the sun shot his declining beams through a deep crevice in the ridge which stretched along the river and illuminated the valley for a short distance, bringing out in bold relief the tall sycamores, oaks and elms standing on the east bank of the stream. It was a dazzling field of gold with a magnificent background of blue sky. A red leaf was now and then hurled from the tall crest of some stately sugar-maple, the lower boughs of which reflected back again the undulations from the clear mirror in the river below as the gorgeous ripples widened and circled outward from the oars.

On a narrow point of land jutting out into the river, a fire had been kindled, which sent a thin column of blue smoke straight into the air, high above the surrounding trees, serving as a beacon to guide the little craft to the right harbor. While the boat was on the last stretch toward the shore a tall man stepped to the water's edge, shouted a welcome and then quickly disappeared. Westbrook thought he recognized the man on the shore. The fair-haired pilot kept waving and beckoning for him to come down and meet them. Her companion in the boat felt uneasy, he knew not why, but it looked like a trap for somebody, so he rested the oars and asked, before he allowed the boat to proceed to the bank:

"Are you sure this is the place and that your friend will be here to meet you? If that man we saw just now is he, why such strange actions?"

"Yes, that was he, but possibly he was surprised to see you with me and does not care to come down

until you are gone. It will be all right for you to leave me here, for he will soon come for me," replied Bessie with a civility that chafed, for there was a grim smile lurking behind it which the other caught and could not understand.

"No, I will hardly be so discourteous or inconsiderate as to leave anyone in my charge alone in a wild place like this just as night is falling. I am going to protect you until I think it advisable to turn you over to other hands after I am convinced that you will then be equally well cared for," he indicated so pointedly that Bessie knew it would be useless to demur, for at the same time she was met by an almost imperceptible look, the meaning of which could not be mistaken.

"You have not yet told me the name of the one you expect to meet here, and unless I know him or become convinced that your safety will be assured, I shall be compelled to be a little harsh with you, I fear, and insist that you accompany me back to your home."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you—it's only Paul Tice, and it is not far over to my uncle's after we are through Windy Pass. We can get there by night easy enough, for I have gone this way before."

"Looks like an elopement," Westbrook said to himself.

"Come on down, Paul, it's only Mr. Westbrook," Bessie shouted as the boat grated on the gravel bar and stopped at the water's edge.

Paul Tice came out from among a cluster of cedars and after welcoming them made a vain excuse

for his disappearance by saying that he had gone back to the horses at the foot of the trail when he heard a noise as if they were being disturbed. He thanked Westbrook in profuse terms for aiding Miss Ellsworth in crossing the river, at the same time insisting that he accompany them a short distance to where the trail begins. This Westbrook decided to do, but with a feeling of apprehension. However, he desired to see that Bessie should get properly started on her trip. Then retracing his steps after he had started up the bank he intimated his desire to return to the boat for his gun, but Paul ridiculed the idea.

"Why, it is only a few steps more; what would you need a gun for, anyway? I have been here most all the afternoon, and no one has come to disturb me. I wouldn't bother about my gun," he urged.

The horses were there, as Paul had said, only they were considerably farther away than he had intimated. Still Westbrook thought little of that fact. After questioning them further regarding the trip, and helping Bessie to mount, he bade them good-by and watched them ride away up the narrow winding trail with a secret feeling of uneasiness as if he had been guilty of some wrongdoing, he knew not what. He thought as he walked back toward the boat that if any harm should come to the girl he would have to bear part of the blame, for Wilfred Clifton had seen them together. He had no especial reason to fear perfidy on the part of Paul Tice, having never heard anything deroga-

tory to his character except that he was a Bald Knobber, which was no reflection, for there were only a few lawless characters connected with the organization, he had been informed. Knowing more of Wade Drexel than any other member made him somewhat suspicious of the good intentions of the other members, for it is natural for everyone in any society to remember a bad man's deeds rather than the acts of a score of good men. Westbrook had begun to doubt the integrity of Paul Tice owing to the fact that he had so long been Drexel's companion, believing that he had been dominated by the latter's influence and had been induced to assist in carrying out some of his dark plans.

It was such thoughts as these that occupied Westbrook as he passed along the dim path leading to the boat, when from behind a dense hawthorn bush he heard a sudden rustle and before he could turn felt two strong arms pinion his own from behind, while two other men appeared in front, one holding a long squirrel rifle on a level with his head, until the other could draw a buckskin string from his pocket and tie his hands. Two of the men he had never seen before, but he saw in their rugged features, steady gray eyes and strong, wiry frames characteristics of typical mountaineers. The man who first seized him was the only one who wore a mask, and he refrained from talking. There was no use to struggle; he was outnumbered and they had already taken his gun. He felt but little fear and no weakness, for he was given strength in *some mysterious way* to bear up, as we all are when

the crucial test comes. Many fear to face impending calamities, believing that at such times their courage will desert them and they will be left helpless; but after the dreaded moment has passed they recall how surprisingly well that inscrutable, potential strength warded off the horrible inward sinking which they so much feared, so Westbrook calmly stood the ordeal, secretly hoping that he would come out unscathed, but how, he dared not conjecture.

The meaning of it all flashed upon him in an instant—Paul Tice had played the traitor. He had come to the place with friends who were to help him get away with Bessie. Upon discovering that she was accompanied by the man who was Wade Drexel's enemy, a plot was quickly laid. Paul was to get the girl away so that she would not know; then his assistants were to seize her companion. The man who wore the mask could be none other than Drexel himself, the instigator of the plot, and there was something in the general appearance of one of the men that reminded Westbrook of the man who had stood guarding the horses to the stage-coach a fortnight ago when it was stopped by Drexel near Forsyth. All this was soon perfectly clear to him. Why did he not act upon his fear while crossing the river and compel the girl to return home, thus saving himself and her from—he feared to predict what? How often do ideas thus come trooping through our brain after, alas, it is too late to utilize them!

The three men stepped to one side, and in low tones held a lengthy consultation. They did not seem to be able to agree upon a concerted course of action—the man wearing the mask seemed to be opposed by the other two; finally they returned, and one of them, in a gruff voice, commanded:

“Move on down the hill and don’t talk back or try to run away.”

Westbrook was taken about two miles down the river, across the mouth of Rocky Canyon and into a desolate ravine through which Brush Creek flows, where they halted, bound their captive to a pine tree, built a fire and proceeded to cook a few fish which had been caught by one of the outlaws during the afternoon, but they did not invite their guest to share their meal.

Although the men talked in low tones, Westbrook learned from the fragments of speech which he overheard that they were so far from their own homes or those of friends they would remain there for the night; what then might happen he could not find out. He caught the names Buck and Red, and remembered having been told that Buck Amick and Red Doak were among the worst characters that could be found in the Ozarks, and that they, together with Wade Drexel, who, it was said, had turned outlaw after a disappointment in love, as is sometimes the case with men with no stability of character, were guilty of most of the crimes that had been attributed unjustly to the Bald Knobbers as a whole.

Neither were the captors nor the captive cognizant of the fact that any being was near at that

time, but the whole incident had been carefully scrutinized and the party had been followed at a safe distance by stealthy feet.

The tightly drawn buckskin strings had begun to annoy Westbrook, cutting into the flesh until the blood was nearly drawn, and he had begun to experience pangs of thirst and hunger. His fear increased as night drew her curtain down closer, still and chilly. He had no hopes of being rescued; no one could know where he was, and it was very improbable that any friend of his would chance to find him in such an unfrequented place. He knew that he was in the hands of desperate men, one of whom had repeatedly tried to take his life, and since his experience in the Black Eagle hotel at Forsyth he could not hope for mercy at the hands of his enemy. What torture and ignominious death awaited him he did not know; he was certain that he would at least be roughly dealt with. How were his relatives and friends to know how he had met his fate? Angenette would believe that he had disappeared with Bessie and would therefore curse his memory for ever, and to die without being given a chance to defend himself! All this rushed through his mind. Night had brought neither aid nor comfort to the unhappy captive. There, bound and fettered to that forest tree, far from the fireside of his home, environed by a wild, unbroken solitude, with no friendly voice borne to his ears; no watch-dog's bark to make him glad with its familiar sound; no low of herded cattle, nor tinkling sheep-bell which he had been accustomed

to hear on evenings as he sat musing in front of the club-house, Westbrook suffered and waited with splendid fortitude.

At length, as night wore on, the three Bald Knobbers, by their deep and heavy respiration, announced to their wakeful captive that they slept. Satisfied that his tormentors were sleeping soundly, his brain was busy with thoughts of escape. After a long and painful exertion he failed to effect the release of his hands from the cords which bound them. Then his head declined in despair; he closed his eyes and resigned himself to his fate. Presently he thought he felt one of the cords loosen, then another. Was he dreaming? What tantalizing vision came to add to his misery? At last he tried to move his hands—thank God, they were both free! What spirit of the air had come to save him? Gently he felt a hand tighten upon his arm; turning, he was surprised to see an Indian holding a glistening knife. By the dim starlight he soon recognized his liberator, his old friend, Hawk-Eye, who had been hunting in the vicinity where Westbrook and Bessie landed that afternoon, and had seen the Bald Knobbers seize him. The Indian motioned for him to follow. They breathlessly, with noiseless steps, hastened from the place. The attorney knew not whither they went, nor cared, if that it but served to widen the distance between him and his hated captors.

On they hurried through the thicket and over the slough, passing the ravine, and then ascending the hill; with weary and difficult steps they reached

its summit. Westbrook paused a moment to recover his breath, when, looking toward the eastern horizon, he perceived it was fast dappling into day. Once more he moved onward. A sound fell upon his ear. He halted again for a moment while the Indian plunged on. With distinctness it was repeated again and recognized—not in the dolorous note of the distant night bird; not in the dismal howl of the wolf, nor yet in the shrill scream of the panther. To him these sounds were only too welcome; but then there rose a sound more horrid still—the wild yell of the bloodthirsty Bald Knobbers—fiends bent on murder, as he well knew. They were so near that he feared they had seen him and were close behind. Such a sound to the hunted, especially so loud upon the still morning air, is enough to chill the blood. Westbrook's escape had been discovered, and he and his liberator were pursued. This thought caused them to hasten.

Still on they fled, and on followed their pursuers. Nearer and nearer they approached, while faster, louder and longer echoed the peculiar yell, through the forest, which was taken to mean a signal to the Bald Knobbers' friends for assistance, should any of them be in that vicinity. Westbrook and Hawk-Eye passed through another valley, and another hill lay before them. The Indian had not spoken a word. He kept several paces ahead, pushing on, on, as if his sinews were of steel and incapable of tiring. The man that was trying to follow him, although an athlete and used to long tramps through the woods, at times was ready to give up.

Sometimes he was on the point of falling prone upon the ground and letting fate decide the issue.

"Now, I will lie down on the moss under that tree yonder and rest," he would say, but when he reached the inviting spot he was urged on. He was bruised by constant stumbles over unseen bowlders, and scratched by slipping on rocks and by coming in contact with low-hung branches of the dense woods. His foot plunged through the dead leaves into a deep crevice between two flat stones, wrenching his ankle. Although the pain was keen as a knife, he must forge ahead.

"I will follow until I drop dead. I would be hopelessly lost and could never get out of here unaided. Besides, there is certain death behind," he reasoned, his breath coming hard.

He saw Hawk-Eye dart into an opening in a huge rock on the banks of White River, just above high-water mark. He clambered after his guide, slipped, fell back, but was helped into the cave by the Indian, and followed him a short distance inside, then sank down exhausted, swooned and knew nothing more.

When he revived a few hours later, Westbrook discovered that he was lying upon a couch of luxuriant furs, bear, buffalo, wolf and other skins of wild animals; near him had been placed a warm bowl of soup and he caught the delicious odor of coffee. Not far away a cheerful fire sent forth waves of warmth and flickering rays of light, near which sat his benefactor, the silent Indian, leisurely smoking his long-stemmed pipe. The club-man

started to raise himself up, but found his strength was insufficient. Presently Hawk-Eye came over to his side. After pouring several concoctions, which he had just extracted from roots and weeds, into a cup made from a gourd, he stirred them and then handed the gourd to his patient.

"Drink him," he demanded, and Westbrook obeyed without comment.

By the following day he had almost regained his former strength. The Indian had nursed him with great tenderness, and his sleep, after the long hours of suffering and anxiety, was deep and sweet, for notwithstanding the fact that he did not know where he was, he knew he was safe and had nothing to fear while the guest of the kindly Osage.

During the entire time few words were spoken, for Hawk-Eye was by nature taciturn, and the rescued captive was too full of gratitude and strange thoughts to feel communicative to anyone. He knew he had again narrowly escaped death. There could be no doubt about that.

He examined his surroundings as soon as he was able to leave the cave, and found that this great cavern selected by his Indian friend was, indeed, a wonderful place. It had an arched roof, twenty-five or thirty feet high, and extended back over one hundred feet. Above it were high, perpendicular limestone bluffs, surmounted with cedars, above which were often seen, sailing in the blue sky, eagles and other birds of prey.

Westbrook then recalled the stories old Eph Hubb and Uncle Bill Davis had told him regarding

a cave of this description, which was beyond question the one Hawk-Eye was using for his dwelling-place. He had been told that it had occasionally afforded temporary winter quarters for families ascending the river, and tradition made it a citadel of Spanish river pirates in early times. In the high arch of the principal apartment was an opening leading to a spacious chamber above, inaccessible except through a small aperture. To this, he had been told, the pirates ascended by a ladder, which they drew up after them, and were secure from almost any strength of assailing force that might be brought against them.

There are many legends of romantic adventure and bloody deeds connected with the place, and doubtless some of them do not adhere strictly to facts, at least in part. Westbrook had been told a story of considerable length, the scene of which was laid in this cavern, but he regarded it as romantic to the extent of improbability. The tradition, in substance, follows:

A distinguished Mexican was made the captain of a pirate band. A boat was captured, having on board an old priest, his niece and her lover. The priest's object was to convey his niece out of the reach of her accepted admirer. When the boat was taken and the crew and passengers carried to the cave as captives, he was devising plans, not the most conscientious, to dispose of the young man. The robber chief, ascertaining the facts, compelled the priest to marry the young couple. At the same time a boat approached the cave, and two persons,

who proved to be insurrectionists, sought and obtained an interview with the chief, who was persuaded to join their expedition against his native country.

Once, as Westbrook lay on his couch of skins and let his eyes wander along the gray walls of the cave, these stories came back to him, and he regarded the cavern, even apart from the fiction and the fabulous, a natural curiosity of quite interesting character. He remembered that the old men at the cross-roads store had told him the cave was located many miles from the club-house. How he was to get back he did not know. He would not abuse the hospitality and generosity of his Indian friend by asking his aid. Really, there was little need to go back, for he had given orders the day he left on his last hunting trip for his baggage to be hauled to Forsyth, where he intended to get it and return home for the winter. He had planned spending the evening before the day of his departure at the Clifton home.

"I certainly should not go away without seeing Angenette, especially at such a time when I ought to explain everything," he said reflectively.

Just then Hawk-Eye came up, wearing the first smile he had ever seen on his kindly but sad face.

"Ketchum otter," he said as he flung his burden down, together with a mink, a raccoon and a catamount. These animals, except the wary otter, which is infrequently taken, were his usual reward for his labors as trapper.

That afternoon Westbrook discovered that he could take a trail not far from the cave and eventually gain the main road leading to Forsyth.

"I will doubtless be able to discover a passing wagon when I reach the road which will take me on to the town," he said to himself, but Hawk-Eye would not let him go away alone, declaring that he would accompany his guest as far as the road. He gave Westbrook a splendid pair of buckskin moccasins, beautifully fringed and beaded, which the latter had observed the Indian making, but when he asked about them he got no reply. Such was the fate of most of his questions.

"I make him fer you," Hawk-Eye said simply. Then he shouldered his trusted rifle and led the way.

When they parted at the road the young attorney was too full of emotion to thank his benefactor for his invaluable services. He merely clasped Hawk-Eye's hand, feeling that he owed a world of gratitude, which his lips failed to utter.

"Cum often—stay long," were the Indian's parting words.

Westbrook fell in with Ezra Dobbins, who was hauling a sack of corn to the water-mill at Forsyth. The old man, who had frequently questioned Westbrook all about his private affairs and everything else he could think of, as was his custom upon meeting all strangers, was delighted to accommodate the pedestrian.

"Never were ez glad ter see a feller in all me life," he began when he discovered that it was



"The rocky road that wound through the mountains"



the club member whom he had often seen during the past summer. "Tell ye why; heerd yisterday night thet some fellers wuz layin' fer ye roun' the club-house over thar on the river. Better not go nigh fer a bit, I reckon—mout cum and stay at my cabin awhile'—got plenty of 'possum meat, sweet 'taters an' co'n bread—will hev when I git back frum th' mill—whut more'd a feller want?"

Westbrook decided that he had better not return to the club-house, partly because of the fact that his enemies were waiting there to cause him more trouble and partly owing to the fact that he received a letter when he reached Forsyth which made it necessary for him to return to St. Louis immediately and attend to important business. So he decided to go on at once, although it caused him no little worry and regret to leave Angenette so unceremoniously. He felt that he ought to tell her of his remarkable experiences in a heart to heart talk, which would be better than to try an explanation, through the medium of a letter, of his apparently insincere actions. But there was no other course to be pursued, so with a sad heart and a weary brain he boarded the old weather-beaten stage coach. The driver, Alec Erbo, greeting him with a hearty handshake and a bland smile, sought vainly to entertain him, as the ponderous vehicle rumbled over the rocky road that wound through the mountains.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SOCIAL GATHERING ON BUZZARD RIDGE

January was ushered in with a furious snow-storm, somewhat belated but none the less welcome, for it was the first one of much consequence of the winter. It spread a deep mantle of ermine over the valley through which White River flowed with a muffled sound. Beaver, Bee and Swan creeks, edged with ice, marked their winding courses, like ropes of steel, far between the mountains, whose rugged steeps were now completely wrapped with white blankets. How pure the air was, pervaded with ozone that toned the nerves like wine! What a deep silence settled over all! No wind stirred the clean, naked limbs of the towering sycamores or disturbed the snow-laden boughs of the pines on the crest of the ridges, whose outlines were clearly drawn against the intensely blue dome of the sky. The dark cedars stood in lines on the brow of the mountains, silent as sentinels, guarding the peaceful valleys below.

There was little evidence of life in the Ozarks on the morning after the snow had ceased falling, save here and there might be seen a thin column of blue smoke ascending from some lone cabin. There was no shout of human voice, no low of wandering cattle, no melancholy bleat of sheep, no eager bark of hound or cur, no lusty crow of chanticleer.

It was a scene of magnificence. A time for reflection; a time for the harvest of the mind. Nature had granted a respite to the toilers in the daily tread-mill of existence, and had given to weary humanity an opportunity both to rest and to reflect. But few, how few, take advantage of such times to devote the hours of seclusion to the purification of the mind with cheerful and wholesome thoughts! At such times how many possess a nature esthetic enough to properly appreciate the wonderful beauty spread around them—the geometric forms in the snow, the delicate feathery tracery on the boughs of the trees, the ornate frescoes of the bluffs, the grotesque ice-ferns by the streams or the arabesques of frost along the enchanted aisles of the forest? Nature at such times rivals in beauty any scenes she ever shows in the season of flowers or the faded leaf.

But to the simple rural folk, the plain mountaineers of the Ozarks, such a time means social gatherings, parties, dances and many another similar form of diversion. They like the snow and do not mind the cold. Little do they care for a ride of ten or fifteen miles over the hills and through the hollows if an evening is to be spent in revelry; for now that the crops are all gathered and garnered, the hay in the stack, the fodder in the barn, the corn in the bin, the apples buried and the cider barreled—no one is busy except the trapper, and even he finds ample time for amusement in his favorite winter sport, which, strange as it may seem, is always indoors. It is true sleighs are used,

but only for the purpose of traveling to the homes of those who are to be hosts for the neighborhood. Such sports as skeeing, tobogganing and even skating are practically unknown in the Ozarks.

Upon this particular occasion Jep Sapp, of Buz-zard Ridge, was to entertain at a party, and all the people of that section of the mountains had been notified. Old sleighs, covered with dust, were dragged out from their shelters and new ones put in commission. The day was spent in getting ready for the event and every household in the vicinity of Pine Knob for a radius of a dozen miles around indicated in one way or another that an event of unusual importance was to take place on the following night, for Jep Sapp, his wife Clarinda, and their daughter Melvina, were noted for the lavish hospitality with which they entertained. The best fiddler was always procured, the best hard-cider, pop-corn and molasses-candy served, and more freedom was given their guests than at any other place in the neighborhood.

The event that night was to celebrate Melvina's eighteenth birthday. It marked an important milestone in her career and was a red-letter day in her calendar, for her mother had said to her:

"Now, Melvina, a'ter ye air eighteen y'ars ole, ye kin kitch all th' beaux ye wanter."

The red-headed daughter giggled appreciatively, but she had already been "sparkin' on the side," as she had confided to a neighbor friend. Several gallant swains of the district had been sighing around her for some time. This was to be her debut into

the society of Buzzard Ridge, and her anticipations of the delights of being a factor in the social whirl there, meant to her as much as the coming out of an heiress in the smart set of a metropolis.

"But you mus' ac' plum nice and not be too frisky ternight, er ye mout sp'il everything," cautioned her mother.

Melvina giggled again, but said nothing, being too busy curling her stubby "bangs" and in other ways striving to make her personal charms as pronounced as possible, for Reuben Tate had promised that he would surely be present.

Reuben was shy. He was her senior only by a few weeks and this was the first time he had felt the "tender passion," which came to him like an attack of heart-failure. Since his first meeting with Melvina he had practiced self-torture, becoming so that he could now wear a collar on Sunday without any outward show of discomfort, however much it chafed him. That afternoon before the party he tried in vain to coax a shine on his ancient number eleven brogans with stove polish. The following night he was to wear his first necktie, which he induced his mother to make of the cloth left from a recent gorgeously flowered calico apron, by promising her that he would "tote" in all the stove-wood she needed during the rest of the winter. But he had no intention of carrying in any wood that day. It was always tomorrow with Reuben. He was always tired. In summer, when the cockle-burs were choking the corn, he spent the time lounging in the shade of the elder bushes,

and in winter he would stand with his back to the fire and yawn, saying that he was too tired to do up the chores.

Al Arp met Jeems Henry Pigg, who came loping down from 'Possum Trot Hollow on a little blue mule that shied when Arp's yellow dog jumped out at him, plowing his feet into the snow. These men were always to be found together at public and social gatherings, and neither of them was ever able to understand how any such meetings, whether a dance or a revival service, could proceed with proper alacrity if they did not have along with them "a leetle o' the ile o' joy" as Al was wont to allude to "mountain dew" or moonshine whisky.

"Whar ye boun' fer; startin' to the party a-ready?" demanded Al as he spit tobacco to one side of the road which melted a half foot square of snow.

"'Ell fire, is this th' night uv th' party? I had clean disremembered hit, shore; course I'm a-goin', ye cross-eyed galoot!" replied Jeems Henry emphatically as he slapped his mule's head with his 'coon-skin cap. "Got any o' ole Yank Doty's brand o' mounting dew 'bout ye anywheres?—need some if we go ternight," said Al.

"Nary a drap, but we'll ist sell one o' pap's ole hosses and blow the money all fer licker; ist got ter git a gallyun fer the party, anyhow," suggested Jeems Henry.

So the two agreed to go at once to the nearest distillery and lay in a supply of whisky.

It is the custom at such gatherings on winter evenings in the Ozarks for the elderly citizens to attend, but their numbers are usually greatly in the minority in comparison with the younger generation. The old people seldom take part in any of the frolics, the men spending their time in some quiet place recalling reminiscences of the early days, and the mothers in another out-of-the-way corner engage in the latest neighborhood gossip.

When old Yank Doty's daughter, Belinda, came in that morning and inquired of her mother something regarding the new home-made yarn mittens which she intended wearing to the party, Yank, who was seated near the open fire-place, knocked the ashes from his old clay pipe on the andirons and remarked:

"By cracky, if I ain't a-goin' ter thet carryings-on at Jep Sapp's I'll bust a hame-string! I feel like I could trip a few Virginyar Reels jist ez well ez I did thuty y'ars ago; jist lemme git these 'ere ole cowhide boots greased ep a bit with mutton taller an' ye'll see thet I'm still a critter what's got some ginger left in his heels."

"You ain't a-goin' ter do no sich thing, Yank Doty," said Jemima, his wife. "Wouldn't you be a purty critter 'mongst them supple j'inted young folks?"

"My supple j'intedness will be on a equal with any what'll be thar; jist look'e yere how I kin hit the 'double-shuffle' an' the 'back-step,'" said Yank as he began prancing over the carpetless floor, tramping on two tom-cats that sent up a vociferous

complaint of evident pain, and the slumbers of an old spotted hound were also disturbed when the big boots came down with both heels upon his tail. The startled canine gave a mighty yelp and leaped as if he were running a fox by sight and was jumping Beaver Creek at one bound, knocking Yank against a tall jar containing sour cream, which had been placed near the fire in order to hasten its readiness for churning. A flood of clabber gushed over him and across the floor as he kicked down a shovel and a pair of tongs, which added greatly to the din and general confusion as they fell upon the hard rock of the hearth.

"What th' damnation? Who threwed them things at me?" yelled the old man as he leaped up and ran through the door, making for the hen-house, believing that Jemima was after him with the rolling-pin or some other of her favorite weapons. The hen-house was Yank's haven when his wife "tuk one o' her tantrums," as he alluded to her fits of temper. He said he loved to hear the soothing cluck of the hens and enjoy their comradeship. He had been heard to say:

"'Long t'wards th' shank o' the e'enin' in summer, tell you whut I like bes'—hit's ter git out on the back porch a'ter cumin' home frum the still, an' listenin' at the hens ez they cum cluckin' eroun' the corner uv the cabin, with theyr little ones runnin' a'ter 'em, when the ole roosters make a fuss over the wortermellyun seeds at the door; you know we allers eat wortermellyuns on the back porch whar hit's shady. Jest somehow I like ter be 'round hens *an' roosters.*"

Nothing more was said at the Doty home of the forthcoming social event at Jep Sapp's until late in the afternoon, when the old man was seen smearing his boots with tallow and axle grease.

"Look'e yere, Yank Doty, ain't you got no senst?" inquired Jemima.

"Oodles uv senst, ole woman," Yank replied without looking up.

"Don't 'pear like hit. Do you mean ter say thet you are a-goin' ter that terdo out yander on Buzzard Ridge?"

"I don't mean ter say nuthin' 'bout hit—I mean ter go."

"An' you with them rheumatiz j'int's, an' thet pain thet cums in yer side, an' them bunyons on yer foot, 'sides you know you've been gruntin' pow'-ful with yer back lately. W'y, ye air a besotted idiot."

"Rheumatiz, bunyons, lame backs an' sore sides be dodrotted—I'm a-goin' ter thet shindig er I'll bust a belly-band."

"Then I'm a-goin', too."

"Whut the tarnashun do I keer whut ye do—ye kin go an' jump in the crick if ye want."

"Naw, thet'd please ye too well."

Early supper was eaten at the Doty cabin and the old man placed some hay in the rear of the sleigh, adjusted a spring-seat on the front end, and hitched two clumsy hammer-headed horses that had seen better days to the outfit, and they were off for the Sapp home, which was only a few miles distant.

Soon after nightfall those coming toward Buzard Ridge could hear mules braying, dogs fighting and boisterous laughing around the Sapp cabin, for the crowd always comes early and stays late at such gatherings.

All the movables had been carried from one room and the floor sprinkled liberally with sawdust. In one corner sat Dode Brock, a left-handed fiddler, and by him stood the caller, Jep Sapp himself, who, in a long-drawn-out nasal tone of voice, was directing the whirling lassies and swains, as they were inspired by such strains as "Shoot-the-Buffalo," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and "London Bridge," while in an adjoining room others were seated in little groups playing "'Possum Pie," "Pop the Pickle," and "Tea-Kettle." In one corner sat Uncle Bill Davis, Yank Doty, Eph Hubb, Cid Wampley, Jake Hinkle, Doc Gouty and other old men, telling war stories which were listened to by a half dozen cotton-headed, ragged urchins, who stood with gaping mouths and wide-open eyes.

"Reminds me o' when I fit the Mexicans back in the fo'ties—" began old Eph Hubb, but Cid Wampley had already begun to relate an experience of the Civil War and he would not be interrupted until he had finished.

"Ez I wuz a-sayin' before," Cid resumed, "I had been marchin' all day a'ter the battle o' Bull Run an' had got so all-fired nigh tuckered out thet I couldn't go no further, when me and the few fellers thet wuz left in my comp'ny stopped ter make camp. I sot down on whut I thought wuz a log thet

the bark had been burned off uv. Reckon I fell asleep an' didn't wake up till next day. I soon seed thet things looked changed from whut they wuz when I stopped the night before, fer we wuz then in the woods, now I wuz in a pasture and all my comrades wuz gone. I happened to examine whut I wuz a-settin' on, and whut do ye reckon hit wuz?"

"Afeard ter say," ejaculated Jake Hinkle.

"Hit wuz a monstrous blacksnake," concluded Wampley.

"The hardest fout I ever tuk part in wuz ag'in the Sioux Injines in the region o' the Little Big Horn," began Doc Gouty, "whar I fit a'ter my company had all b'en slaid tel they wuz dead Injines piled ep 'fore me ez high ez the roof uv this house, an' when the fout was over twenty-one arrows wuz pulled out o' me."

"I rec'lect—now I wouldn't be sartin—but if my old mem'ry ain't failed me, hit wuz at the battle o' Brandy-on-the-Wine," began Uncle Bill Davis after listening patiently to the wonderful stories of heroism by the other veterans, "that our commander laid the slickest trap fer the inemy you ever see. He had a lot of bob-wire stretched across the river under the worter." Here Uncle Bill paused, reaching into his pocket for his big jack-knife, blew some oat-hulls from the handle before he opened it and began whittling from a piece of pine which he severed off the box upon which he was sitting, wiped his forehead with his red bandanna and resumed: "We jest laid low tel the inemy got on the bluff overlookin' the river when

we tackled 'em an' stampeded 'em, made 'em jump over the bluff into the worter thet washed 'em down into the bob-wire, rig'ment a'ter rig'ment—slaid 'em by the millyuns."

"Thet's nuthin' to whut happened when I fit the Mexicans back in the fo'ties—" began old Eph Hubb again, but just then Dode Brock, the fiddler, struck up "Turkey-in-the-Straw," which proved too much for old Yank Doty, who had up to this time not paid any particular attention to what was going on in the adjoining room, although he had been seen to sway his head from side to side and stamp both heels of his boots upon the floor, keeping time to the music; but now that his favorite air was being played he felt his old-time vigor, and with a whoop he threw his cap against the ceiling, overturned the pine box upon which Jake Hinkle was seated, stumbled over Eph Hubb's wooden leg and leaped into the middle of the "ball-room," where the dancers were starting the last set. He seized old lady Swadlow, who was standing in the door, an interested spectator, and they went whirling around the room, much to the amusement of the younger guests. But his rheumatism soon reminded Yank that even "Turkey-in-the-Straw" should not arouse his enthusiasm beyond the bounds of reason, and he went limping away, swearing incoherently.

Although the party was given in honor of Miss Melvina Sapp, that lady was not in evidence, and no one took any pains to hunt her up for the purpose of paying their respects and to offer their con-

gratulations; in fact, her absence during the major part of the evening had not been noticed in the excitement and hum of voices. And none of the guests knew that an interesting courtship was being conducted as a side issue, between Melvina Sapp and Reuben Tate as they sat by the kitchen fireplace in a one-room cabin in the corner of the yard. It is the custom in some parts of the Ozarks to build the kitchen apart from the rest of the residence.

Melvina and Reuben had stolen unobserved into this apartment, rekindled the fire, by whose flickering light they admired each other's charms, although Reuben's collar made him somewhat miserable and Melvina's new shoes were far from comfortable, but she had on all her jewelry, including two rings which left black streaks around her finger and smelled of brass, and an old necklace somewhat tarnished by time. These, she thought, compensated for all slight inconveniences.

It was some time before either ventured a remark, not even about the recent change in the weather, but finally their embarrassment wore away, and they carried on an animated conversation in this manner:

"Ye glad I cum ternight, Melvina," began Reuben as he folded his arms.

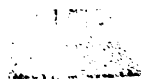
"Pow'ful."

"Gladder ter see me 'an any other feller 'bout Buzzard Ridge?"

"You bet yer boots."

"Bin very sorry ef I hadn't cum?"

"Shore would."



"I'd bin dyin' ter see yer fer long spell."

"Whut did yer want ter see me fer?"

"Ist 'cause."

"Ist 'cause why?"

"'Cause I want ax yer somethin'."

"Whut?"

"Can't ye guess?"

"Mout miss hit."

"Waal, ter ax yer ef they's any reason why we couldn't git splict?"

"Fer lan' sakes!"

"Thet's whut I hev had on my mind."

"Ye don't mean hit?"

"Do, too."

"Bet yer don't?"

"Bet I do."

"Whut'd ma say?"

"She needn't ter know tel we done bin splict."

"Then I'd git a whoopin."

"Not ef we's married."

"Reckon pap'd keer?"

"Ortn't to."

"He don't like yer folks."

"Did he say he didn't like me?"

"Never heerd 'im."

"Waal, then, he wouldn't keer."

"Mebbe not."

"Let's resk hit?"

"Kinder hate to."

"Hate ter marry me?"

"Not edzactly thet."

"Why would ye hate ter, then?"

"Hate ter resk gittin' a floggin'."

"I'd pertect yer."

"You ain't ez big ez pap, though."

"Waal, let's ax 'em ef they keer?"

"You kin."

"I'll do hit termorry."

"But whar'd we live?"

"Oh, anywhar."

"You ain't got no prop'ty but yer steel-traps."

"Make a livin' with 'em."

"An' stay in a cave som'ers?"

"Naw, live in the ole empty cabin in 'Possum Trot Holler."

"'Taint yo'rn."

"Waal, I'll buy hit when I sell my furs."

"All right, reckon we mout try hit, then."

"Melvina, won't yer kiss me?"

"Hadn't orter."

"Shore, ef we're goin' ter git married."

"Mout git ketched."

"Aw! it's too dark fer us ter be seed."

"Aw! g'long."

But Reuben, who had been gradually drawing near Melvina during the portrayal of his grand passion, and who had been holding her trembling hand for some time, which he gently pressed, drew her to him when she strove between giggles to move away to the other end of the rough oak slab upon which they were seated. Winding his long arms around her, the perspiration burst out on his forehead, trickling down through the white fuzz covering his face, and his heart climbed into his throat.

He was about to plant a kiss upon her densely freckled cheek, when a face appeared at the window; then there was a sudden rush against the door, which shoved to one side the empty barrels and boxes Reuben had used to barricade it.

The air was burdened by a series of explosions of earnest, logical profanity from the gruff intruder, who proved to be none other than Melvina's irate father. Then there was a hasty exit of a long, gawky stripling through the door, closely followed by a heavy boot, and soon could be heard audible sobs and a pleading feminine voice in a dark corner of the room; these utterances of a broken heart were simultaneous with the thud of a barrel-stave, applied by a fatherly hand, none too gently.

The guests, who had ceased the various games, wondered at the sheepish look and the dry grin on Reuben Tate's face when he entered the room, soon followed by Jep Sapp, who frowned savagely when he looked at Reuben as he sat in a corner with both hands clasped between his knees, but when they saw Melvina's red, swollen eyes, and remembered that neither she nor young Tate had been seen during the evening, they guessed that something had happened, but were considerate enough of the couple's feelings to ask no questions or make any comment. So none ever knew how the love of two young hearts had flamed up brilliantly for a moment, only to be rudely blighted for ever.

With this exception the evening was without unusual incident.

Jeems Henry Pigg and Al Arp had plenty "o' sperits" with them, but mountain dew served only to make them more friendly as well as hilarious. Wade Drexel and his boon companions, Red Doak and Buck Amick, who stopped for a short time, began to start a row by making some deprecatory remarks regarding some of the young women present. Jep Sapp, Al Arp and Jeems Henry Pigg promptly conducting them from the house, compelled them, at the point of revolvers, to mount their horses and ride away.

Yank Doty deserted the rest of the old men before the evening was half over and took part in some of the games played by the younger guests, for he was still something of a flirt and liked to joke the young women. He talked so long to Phoebe Jones, a young grass-widow who lived a few miles from him, who had recently cast her lot with the Buzzard Ridge people, that Jemima made some excuse to call him out in the other room, but he would not go for some time. Finally he hunted her up and said:

"Say, ole woman, thet widder Jones says she's afeard she can't find the road hum frum yere—hit's pow'ful dark ye know, 'sides she hain't never b'en over the road, fer she cum anuther way, frum 'way beyant Bee Crick whar she's b'en visitin'. Looks like we ort ter show our horspitivity to our new neebors; 'pears like I'd better drive her hum. You kin go ahead ontill you git to her house whar ye kin wait fer us."

Jemima thought that Yank was telling her a pretty flimsy story, remembering that Mrs. Jones

had come directly from her home to the party, for she had seen her some distance ahead just before they reached the Sapp home; however, she consented to Yank's plan so readily that it made him wonder, for he knew how jealous she had been when he mentioned other women in her presence.

Jemima at once began examining Mrs. Jones's cloak, veil, and other apparel which she had worn to the party. Jemima found that they were not noticeably different from her own, with the exception of the small shawl which the widow had worn on her head. This, Jemima took, leaving her own, and carefully concealed her face in her veil and hastened out to Mrs. Jones's sleigh where she found Yank waiting. Mrs. Jones was still in the house with a few other guests. For some reason she had been delayed, possibly on account of not being able to find her shawl, which fact gave Jemima ample time to put her hastily formed plans into effect. Yank readily helped her into the sleigh, something he had not done for years. He had scarcely settled in the seat beside her until he began:

"Fact is, Mrs. Jones, this is th' bes' part uv th' hull shootin'-match; thet bloomin' party wouldn't amounted ter much in my estimation ef hit warn't fer this ride hum with ye, which I 'preciate more'n ye kin imagine. Makes me feel twenty y'ars younger. Hit takes a pow'ful purty young woman ter make us old—er not 'zackly old—but megium aged men feel like we wuz boys ag'in. How much differunt I feel now than I would ef you wuz Jemima. W'y, ef I had you ter take 'round instid

uv a ole greasy galoot like her, w'y I'd be tickled plum ter death. I'd take you ever'wheres, buy you all sorts uv fine dresses an' things—I would thet. I'd b'en thinkin' 'bout cumin' over an' see how ye wuz ploddin' erlong. Guess I'll cum often now. B'en thinkin' 'bout gittin' a 'vorce frum the ole woman, anyhow, since she's got so tarnashun on-godly thet I kin hardly live 'round her. Ondoubt-edly hit would be fur differunt with you."

Jemima successfully imitated Phoebe Jones's soft laugh, but said nothing. Just as they reached 'Possum Trot Hollow, where the sleigh that had followed close behind them turned off the main road into a road leading toward Pine Knob, Yank tentatively slipped his arm around the waist of the supposed Mrs. Jones, who gave a little wince and jabbed the old man in the ribs with her elbow, but he was not easily frightened, and did not remove his arm, although the horse became almost unmanageable.

"Whoa, thar, ye durned mustang!" shouted Yank, and then continued to his companion:

"What a fine figger you hev got, Mrs. Jones! —'taint all outer shape like Jemima's; w'y, I'd jist ez lief put my arm eround a sack o' bran ez her, but with you hit's fur different."

Just then two horses dashed up behind them and a woman's voice rose distinctly on the still night air as she turned out of the road alongside the sleigh ahead:

"Mr. Doty, you seem to have made a mistake and run off with my sleigh. I think our shawls were also exchanged, Mrs. Doty."

"W'y, Mrs. Jones, how on airth could thet a-happened, ye reckon?" returned Jemima as Yank smothered an oath.

They drove on in silence to the Jones farm, where they changed sleighs, the widow mystified as to how the mistake was made, Yank mad because the old woman had outwitted him, and Jemima planning how best to administer the punishment to him which he deserved.

What the old couple said to each other as they drove on to the Doty cabin, could not, with propriety, be reproduced here.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CRIME

The *tratatplan* of horses' hoofs heard on all the roads leading to Alki Bald meant that the Bald Knobbers were to hold a meeting that night in their cave. Many of the members had gathered at the mouth of the cavern and were talking in muffled tones when Seth Bark, the stalwart chief, rode down from the hills behind Iron Knob, with his big Mexican spurs jangling, with two enormous revolvers buckled around him and wearing a large, slouched hat, pulled low upon his forehead, his restless, fiery gray eyes rolling from right to left under shaggy brows.

When the chief arrived and dismounted he was hailed with great formality. With long, hasty strides he approached his men, giving orders, in his usual gruff voice and decisive manner, for pickets to be posted on all the approaches to the cave. Most of the men selected were not new to picket duty, having frequently performed such services during the war between the states. They were given the usual instructions about not permitting any one to pass through the lines without first giving the countersign. The chief entered the small aperture of the cave, and the crowd of silent, stern-faced men filed in after him, one by one.

When they had all assembled in the larger apartment of the great cavern, Seth Bark inquired of a number of the members regarding the opposition that had been manifested against the organization during the past winter. It was ascertained that a number of clashes had occurred with the militia who had dared to openly oppose them. As a result of this antagonism, which had so far been confined to quarrels between individuals, several serious shooting affrays had resulted. The chief was led to believe that some of his men had been disregarding their oath and were guilty of conduct unbecoming law-abiding citizens, which it was his desire to have all his men become. No legal statute was to be violated unless the organization as a whole decided that some court had acted unwisely in enforcing that law, permitting some criminal to escape the punishment he deserved—this they did not regard as lawlessness.

“It’s all right, men, to protect your own interests and look after your own welfare always—that’s what we organized for,” said Seth Bark, “but don’t carry things too far and get yourselves and the entire league into trouble for no just purpose. Remember, there is to be no robbing, burning or murdering, unless it becomes necessary in protecting your own lives. We are not to go out from here as outlaws, committing all kinds of depredations, just because we are powerful and those who are not members of this league are helpless. We want good citizens and we desire to be let alone. But it must be distinctly understood that we won’t

stand for strangers coming into this country and endeavoring to run things to suit themselves. This has been frequently tried of late.

"Wade Drexel, you say there is a family over beyond Crane Creek needing a little cautioning and reminding that this organization is too powerful to be ignored or openly opposed. What ought to be done?" continued the chief, adding, after he had heard the opinions of several of his men, "Maybe some of you who know about the matter had better go over and give them a little chastisement."

After some other business was talked over the Bald Knobbers came out of the cave, called in the pickets, and a part of the band rode away toward the home of Stephen Baird, on Crane Creek, who was one of the men referred to by the chief as needing a gentle reminder that the regulators were still to be reckoned with.

Hoof beats thundered along the road that wound around the base of Alki Bald and on through the valley of Swan Creek, as the desperate gang, yelling like Comanche Indians and punctuating every shout with a revolver shot, urged their spent horses, flecked with foam and shiny, on toward the home of their victims.

While the family and some of the near relations of Stephen Baird were asleep, a shot rang out, and the startled inmates were aroused when a bullet came crashing through the window, shattering the panes into fragments and scattering bits of broken glass over the floor. Then the doors were battered down, and with a yell the gang sprang

into the room, which was but dimly lighted by the dying embers in the fireplace. They began shooting indiscriminately at the pictures on the wall, mirrors, or whatever they could damage.

The frightened family arose to look into the hideously masked faces of the reckless intruders, and rather than submit to the insults and severe beatings which the family knew were in store for them at the hands of the Bald Knobbers, whose identity could not be questioned, although none of them were personally recognized, the household made a concerted and determined resistance, remembering how a neighbor had recently been tortured, having been whipped with rawhides and otherwise cruelly dealt with, while the torturers danced around him, imitating the war dance of victorious savages.

Although the Bald Knobbers had agreed among themselves before making the attack, that no members of the Baird family should be killed, it was soon seen that death must come to some one, for the fight assumed grave proportions and gave every evidence of being fought to the death. Both Stephen Baird and Sam West, his son-in-law, reached for their guns, intending to protect the home at any cost. Observing this, some of the older and cooler-headed members of the gang drew back and took no part in the melee, especially after they saw the incautious recklessness which Wade Drexel was displaying, knowing that a murder would likely be committed.

One of the most courageous defenders of the home, and, indeed, of any home, was the daughter of the old man. She was a typical character of the heroic women of the Ozarks, possessing the nerve and daring not commonly met with in women. She fought the mob with telling effect, even after receiving several wounds.

Jim Baird, son of the old man, was soon in the fight and succeeded in wounding two of the assailants, before he was killed by a heavy blow. The house was filled with that peculiar, pungent odor of burnt gunpowder; and the thud of blows, crack of revolvers, oaths and screams could have been heard miles away on the still night air, had there been any one to hear, but there were no passersby at that dead hour of night and no neighbors were close enough to be awakened by the noise, so the stricken family was left to its fate, and, being outnumbered, the odds were decidedly against the defenders of their home.

Wade Drexel was the first of the Bald Knobbers to be wounded. In a hand-to-hand conflict with the old man, whom he delighted especially to torture, he was shot several times, and he retaliated by shooting his combatant in the shoulder and neck.

Sam West, whose arm had been shattered by a bullet, fought on until overpowered. He successfully wielded a dirk with his uninjured hand, having snatched the keen knife from the belt of an outlaw while in a close encounter. His young wife, daughter of Stephen Baird, caught up the knife which fell from his limp fingers and sought to

avenge the fatal wounds which her husband had received. She tore the mask from the face of one of the Bald Knobbers, and by the flickering fire-light, recognized Red Doak, one of Drexel's accomplices. This incident later proved to be of the greatest significance.

Finally the brave woman sank back exhausted, swooning over the prostrate body of her husband, who had sworn to protect her with his life, and who had faithfully kept his oath.

Just as Wade Drexel was raising his big revolver to club one of the victims, in rushed a great mastiff that had been guarding the children in an adjoining room. With eyes flashing and every muscle taut in his ponderous body, and with an ominous growl he sprang against Drexel, knocking him to the floor, snapping at his throat; but Buck Amick interfered and the dog sank his great fangs into the latter's forearm, causing him to fall back with a howl of rage and pain, dropping his knife. Then he reached for his empty revolver and began clubbing the animal over the head, but to no purpose, the death-like grip of his mighty jaws did not relax until Paul Tice sent a bullet through the dog's heart.

All was still now. Four bodies lay upon the floor—dead? The panting outlaws thought so, for their victims had ceased to stir. The silence became oppressive; the door opened; every Bald Knocker clapped his hand to the holster on his belt that carried his revolver. Was it neighbors come to the rescue? Was another bloody scene to en-

sue? They feared as much. Each desperado quickly shoved his revolver back into its holster, and looked at his fellow murderer blankly. It was only a trembling little girl. A mass of golden curls streamed down upon her white gown, and tears glistened on each cheek as she lifted her large, inquiring blue eyes to one of the outlaws.

"Mam-ma," she lisped.

The big ruffians fled precipitately from the little one as from a thing accursed. Now that they had been given time in which to reflect, to realize the awfulness of the deeds they had done, they were filled with terror at the enormity of their crimes, and, quickly mounting their horses, dashed away into the woods at full gallop—seeking, somewhere—anywhere—to hide from that relentless avenger—conscience.

Then out of a low-hung cloud as black as ebony, that completely hid the myriad lights of heaven, there flamed a brilliant meteor, burning with a fiery finger a path of splendor against the lurid vault overhead. Its sudden resplendence was like a flash of sunshine from a midsummer sky. It revealed with startling clearness every tree, fence and stone.

The Bald Knobbers quaked with fear and their hearts stood still with awe as if it were the day of doom; and fled panic-stricken from the awful searchlight of the meteor, wondering, in their simple superstition, if it were, indeed, a manifestation of the omnipotent God's displeasure. It may have been. Who can say?

CHAPTER XX

A RECONCILIATION

The April morning combined in beautiful harmony the silent sublimity stolen from some rare mid-summer day of the long ago with the more piquant loveliness of spring, when Angenette Clifton swung into the valley road, urging Cricket onward in one of his easiest gaits. How delightful to once again ride among the scenes familiar to her earlier girlhood days! The little black pony seemed to enjoy it as much as she, for he had not heard the voice of his gentle mistress nor felt her dainty hand lightly stroking his proudly arched neck for such a long time. Angenette had just returned home from a winter's visit to relatives of her foster-father in the South.

The mocking-birds, just arrived, wheeled aloft in waving circles. The swallow dipped its wings lightly in the cooling flood below, while from afar the warloon sent forth a wild scream of alarm, and shook the bright drops from his wings as he arose in affright from the river. The crocus and the crowfoot sprinkled the green turf along the roadside and clusters of violets greeted the passerby, while jonquils lifted their cups of gold and primroses tossed their heads proudly, coquetting with *every breeze*.

The months during which Angenette had been away had wrought remarkable changes in her. She had come in contact with the best that society had to offer in an old and refined southern city, where true culture and real aristocracy were to be found. Her mind—young, vigorous and plastic—had assimilated with a remarkable swiftness and avidity much of the esthetic and higher culture. By thus gaining an insight into the real principles of the great outside world for which she had longed in her earlier years—that mysterious world of active men and women of the higher type, who had existed principally in her childhood dreams—she had learned the meaning of the great immensity of life, what it was to be a real, potent factor in the world's affairs. She had returned home more dignified, wiser and sobered, lacking in a degree her old-time vivacity and exuberance of cheerfulness. She was now not only more debonair, but more restless and moody at times than when she went away the previous autumn. Still, when she rode forth that morning, her pulses responded to the brightness of nature with their former buoyancy, to the touch of the ozone that pervaded the air of the surrounding heights, and with the exception of the delicate hint of pathos in her eyes and the faint trace of sorrow upon her face, it was the same Angenette who used to ride along the same roads.

Had it not been for the gay society and the thousand amusing and interesting incidents which crowded into her life during the past winter, those traces of care would have been more pronounced;

for at times her heart had ached and her eyes swam with bitter tears as she plunged again into the giddy whirl at the call of revelry in its many forms, which, after all, she found to be hollow and unsatisfying, serving only to cause her to forget for the moment. There was the canker of grief ever gnawing at her heart, for the heart does not change, although our environment may be constantly shifting. Many were the suitors that she turned away, for reasons which she could not explain and for which they never guessed. From whence had the unrest in her bosom sprung? Was Bernard Westbrook a deceiver? Was he disloyal, faithless, inconstant, a trifler? She tried to think that these things could not be true of the man she loved, but the proof came all too strong, she thought, and she was dazed by it; her brain was almost turned.

Wilfred Clifton, her gentle foster-father, saw her decline, watched the rose vanish from her cheeks after Westbrook went away so unceremoniously with Bessie Ellsworth, without even bidding her good-by, and this only a few days after he had professed such an ardent love for her. How was she to bear the shock? Clifton realized that the crucial moment in her life had arrived, and that she must have a change, must forget; something palliative must be provided at once. He felt her sorrow almost as keenly as if it had been his own. It nearly broke his heart to tell her what he knew would thus affect her, but there remained no other way, and so this sturdy mountaineer, with the heart of a child, this man of few words, but nerves of

steel, gently told her about having seen Westbrook and Bessie together in a boat. He said they appeared to be greatly agitated when they saw him. He did not intend mentioning the fact to her at first, thinking little of the matter, but Wade Drexel had caused word to come to him, to the effect that the couple in the boat had eloped. He still hesitated until he went to the Ellsworth home, where he learned that their daughter was missing, having mysteriously disappeared the day she was seen with Westbrook. She had left no word as to where she intended going or when she would return. Her parents supposed that she had gone to the Clifton home, as she often did, without notifying them, consequently they thought little of her disappearance.

Angenette doubted Westbrook's apparent duplicity in face of all this overwhelming array of alleged facts, but when a few more days had passed and she neither saw him nor heard anything from him, she lost hope, and her faith in the truthfulness and constancy of the human heart was sadly shattered. If her avowed lover, and also her most trusted friend, could thus prove faithless and betray her confidence in such a manner, who was she to trust? Was it not enough to shake the foundations of her being? She could not understand it all, but reason outweighed sentiment and imagination, and she at last forced herself to believe the worst. She wrung her hands and soliloquized while tears surged up from her heart and welled to her eyes.

"It must be true after all. How could there be any mistake? But why must it happen? Why did fate decree such an ordeal for me? Must my heart through all the coming years be darkened because of this? Why must my life be blighted before it had hardly tasted of the pleasures of the world? What have I done to deserve it? Must I wear the heart of the cynic and carry the mind of a misanthrope—I, who surely deserve a better fate? If I do not, I demand why not? seeing that others who are no better and no more deserving are permitted to caress the roses of life without being pricked by the thorns; others revel in the sunshine of bliss, never knowing the shadows of sorrow's clouds—why can't I? What good can come from such a bitter experience? Will my soul be purified by such a fire, or will it be darkened and embittered by it? The future will tell. There may be some mistake, but where is there ground for hope, and to what shall my vacant bosom turn?"

At the solicitation of Wilfred Clifton, Angeline at once began a journey to the South, to be absent from the Ozarks until the following spring, and to be separated from Westbrook, maybe for ever—she did not know.

But the long, dreary months had passed and she was taking her first ride since her return home. Her brain was busy with many thoughts and reminiscences as she entered the little shack used for a post-office, some five miles down the river from the Clifton home. A letter had been awaiting her for several days. Her heart leaped when she saw it.

"Has he written at last? Can he yet explain? Will this give me any relief? Oh, I don't care if it tells everything, just so I am firmly convinced of the truth, for this prolonged suspense is awful," she said under her breath as she glanced at the post-mark and the handwriting on the envelope.

"I never heard of that place before, and a woman must have written it. Who can it be from?" she mused as she turned away, eyed by the usual score or more of loafers at the post-office.

"They's bin a hull passel o' letters cum yere fer you sinct you've bin gone, but they allers sed return to the writer in a few days ef they warn't called fer, so I sent 'em all back—thet's the law, you know, and this yere guv-munt is pow'ful strict 'gardin' the law bein' 'forced, you know," remarked old Ren Pierce, the postmaster, as he leaned through the delivery window, adjusting his spectacles, and carefully scrutinizing the young lady whose beauty and neatness of apparel he had never seen approached.

"Indeed, and do you remember to whom and where they were to be returned?" said Angenette, interestedly.

"Lem-me—see,—now I don't 'pear ter rec'lect—somethin' like—oh, pshaw, I had it right on the end of my tongue then; hev to give it ep, I reckon. Plaguegone the luck! A feller ort to remember sich things, but I guess I ain't got no senst, nphow—blast hit all."

Angenette wanted to prompt the old man and suggest a certain name and address to assist him

in remembering, but she decided to wait until her next visit, for the ogling, gaping crowd of loafers embarrassed her and she hastened to mount her pony.

"I'll try and think hit ep, afore you cum ag'in," shouted the old postmaster to her as she rode away.

After she had galloped out of sight of the curious crowd that stood watching her until she turned the corner of the lane a half-mile away, she drew up on her reins until Cricket slowed into a walk. She tore open the envelope and turned to the bottom of the last page, deciphered Bessie's name, and then began eagerly devouring the long, sad letter. With flushed cheeks and a wildly beating heart she read how her old friend had gone away with Paul Tice, how kind Westbrook had been to Bessie in assisting her across the river, the words of advice he had given her and how solicitous he seemed of her welfare.

"I would have written to you long ago, but dared not, on account of threats by Paul; then I was too humiliated, and decided to suffer alone, keeping my secret to myself," she wrote, adding, "I hope Mr. Westbrook got back home safely that night after he had rowed me across the river. I did not see him after he helped me mount my horse. Give him my thanks. How I wish now I had confided all to him, asking his advice, for I know he would have saved me all that I have suffered since. He is so kind and considerate he would have advised me rightly, no doubt, but I was foolish and relied upon my own judgment—a broken heart is

the result. He is the prince of all men I ever knew and I almost envy your good fortune in being able to claim his affections, which he told me should never waver, because he cared for no one but you. I hope to come back home, if possible, and when I do I think I will tell all the girls back there what a mistake I have made, hoping my misfortune will be a lesson and a warning to them. Paul is not with me all the time. He goes away and stays so long—I seldom know where. Have you seen him since we left? Never trust a man like him.”

“Poor girl,” she sighed as she folded up the letter, “why didn’t she tell me sooner? How much suffering it would have saved me. There has evidently been a very grave mistake. Am I to blame for doubting Bernard? Were those letters that came for me from him explaining all? They must have been. Oh, if I could see him now! Shall I ever see him again? But how can I bear up any longer if I don’t, and hear from his own lips how and why it all happened? Oh, I shall die if I am denied hearing him tell me how it all came about! Surely he will come again, for if he loves me as he said he did he will let nothing stand in the way; he is too brave and good; I know I shall see him.”

Angenette rode leisurely on, lost in thought and utterly oblivious to the awakening charms of nature about her. Her eyes caught the glint of none of the gold strewn beside the road in the form of buttercups and flowers of a similar hue. In vain for her the throats of a hundred songbirds ached with their joyous madrigals. Cricket could walk,

gallop or stop and crop the esculent fresh bluegrass by the roadside, as he so desired—her thoughts were elsewhere. When she neared Beaver Creek, which was more turbulent than usual, a desire took possession of her to revisit the hallowed spot near its convergence with the Little Blue, where she first felt the climax of life's grand passion—the place where but a few months ago, which seemed ages, she had stood with the man she adored, listening entranced to his wonderful confession of love for her. She turned and rode through the woods as near as possible to the place, then dismounted and took the little woodpath that led to it. "How changed!" she thought. Spring in all its reviving gladness had failed to impart half the beauty that autumn had brought to the mossy banks and the overarching trees. How lonely! How desolate!

"No; I will turn back, I can't bear to stand again where I stood that loveliest of days," she said, as she stopped hesitatingly just before rounding the last turn of the path leading to the stream that had heard their plighted vows. Then she was startled upon hearing footsteps and, looking up, she saw Westbrook approaching, wearing his accustomed affable smile and looking at her out of kindly eyes. Was it a vision? At first she thought it too good to be true, but when he grasped her hand warmly, she felt an electric thrill burn through her veins.

"How—delight—fully—surprised!" she began. "I had fancied that you were a thousand miles away. How strange it is that we should both hap-

pen to come here at the same time as if by agreement."

"Yes, but there is a charm about these banks which drew me irresistibly to them. I could not repel the wish to revisit them, but I did not dare hope that I should see you here," returned Westbrook, somewhat confusedly.

"There is something about the place that has a peculiar effect upon one, is there not? Maybe it is because I have—have—well, dreamed about it, at least it is endeared to me," explained the girl, as her color rose.

Westbrook watched her face and took courage.

"This lovely scene and the face associated indissolubly with it, have not only filled my dreams by night, but by day also, robbing me oftentimes of all other pictures that memory tried to recall. So, then, it is not strange after all that we should meet here at a time like this when the earth's season of wooing has come, and every creature of the woods and the air is calling for its mate. I, too, heard the call, and therefore I am here," he said, growing bolder.

"So you have dreamed of it, too?" she asked, as she raised her face to his, questioningly.

"How could it ever cease to haunt me? It is not possible that any other picture on memory's wall will ever detract from its distinctive charm."

"Do you recall everything you said to me that day?" returned Angenette, shyly.

"Possibly not nearly all I said, but all that you said—your every look, laugh and sigh."

"Is it true now that I am to you all that you said I was then?" she replied, softly, as a gentle

trace of pathetic wonder manifested itself in her eyes as their long, silken lashes rose and fell nervously.

"Truth is always unalterable, and what was true then is true now. My heartstrings vibrate with rapture when you are by my side, but they throb with a wail when you are not near. There has been nothing but love in my heart through all these dreary days since then, and it bleeds for you today just as it did before, throwing doubts to the winds and leaving unquestioned your actions during all that sad time, for I can't believe that you meant to be cruel; it was just one of the bitter rulings of fate, the Gethsemane that lurks somewhere in the path of life for every one."

"Now I know you did care and that it was all a horrible misunderstanding—nothing more. I was too hasty in distrusting you, but I will never be again," said the girl, tremblingly.

"Then you have also suffered? Possibly you can imagine how the fire consumed my soul—that mingled fire of longing, remorse and hopelessness. It was not my fault that I left you in such an apparently rude manner. We can not always control circumstances."

"I think I know how to sympathize."

Then, as they lingered once again upon the very spot where they had stood that never-to-be-forgotten day in the mellow October, they looked at each other, face to face, eye to eye, reading each other's heart, feeling that a new compact was that moment sealed between them which the vicissitudes

of coming years, however bitter and inexplicable, could never break; and he gently took her in his arms and kissed away the tears of joy that wet her happy face, saying:

"If a man loves he needs nothing more. It's all right now, dear, and that portion of the past made dark through your absence will be forgotten and hidden away, for with you beside me, nothing else can matter very much."

Then, as they walked away, they each told in detail how their separation and suffering had been caused by an unfortunate combination of peculiar circumstances over which neither had control, and for which neither blamed the other.

"It is in such a fiery furnace that love is tested. Ours, it seems, has been purified and refined, leaving all dross behind, and coming back to us like precious gold, in which state we will try to preserve it, let the future bring what it may," Westbrook said, as they rode on to the Clifton home together over the same road where their exciting race occurred a year ago. And two hearts were never happier; the sun never shone more cheerfully; birds never sang more joyously; flowers never bloomed more sweetly; even the very leaves of the trees seemed to rejoice and clap their hands in glee above them as they rode past.

Each vowed that never again should anything estrange them.

CHAPTER XXI

A CONSPIRACY

"If she will consent to marry me, we will not harm the old man, although he needs a thorough beating, having broken faith with us. When he joined us he took the oath, like the rest, but he has not helped us or attended our meetings since last summer, so it seems he should be reminded that he is neglecting his duties."

It was Wade Drexel's voice as he rode at the head of a dozen horsemen. He was in an ill humor, for his wounds, which had been inflicted during his pistol duel with Stephen Baird, still hurt him, although they had not proved to be so serious as he at first feared.

"He ort ter hev a few rawhides wore out on him, ef nuthin' wuss, fer I've heerd thet he'd like ter quit us fer good, but he knows he can't do it and live yere," replied Buck Amick, the big fellow who rode with Drexel.

This little band of Bald Knobbers was coming up the road that led, after it crossed the Little Blue, by the Clifton residence, only a short distance on a bee line, but about two miles by the road, which, like most all the roads through the Ozark Mountains, winds in serpentine fashion between hills and ridges.

No more was said, the other ten men remaining silent, willing to permit Drexel, their temporary leader, to do all the talking regarding their plans for the night's work.

It was a starlight night, still and pleasant. Angenette, who had wandered down the path leading from the house through the little gulch to the main road, lingered until darkness had settled over the woods, but she was accompanied by her big dog and had no fear of harm. She had concealed herself behind the trunk of a great cotton-wood tree when she heard the horsemen fording the Little Blue. The familiar hollow sound of the horses' hoofs against the flat limestone rocks in the bed of the shallow stream came distinctly for a half-mile through the still night air. She had feared for some time that her father would at last be chastised at the hands of the Bald Knobbers, for she knew he had no sympathy for them, detesting their methods, although he had never dared to say anything against the organization. It was not necessary for her to hear any more to know who the speakers were that she had overheard, and she realized at once that they were going to her home; that it was her father referred to by Drexel and Amick. Remembering what the visits of these men to her neighbors had resulted in, she was for a time conscious of a weakness creeping over her as if she had been seized by a stroke of paralysis, but she soon recovered.

"There is no time to be lost. Something must be done now, for they will surely kill father if he

is not warned, and if I am found there who knows what will happen to me? The ruffians may carry me away and try to compel me to marry that fiend as he has threatened; but I'll not be coward enough to hide here in the woods to escape punishment myself, when I know that my dear old father is being tortured—we will suffer together," she said almost frantically, adding, "If I run my best, I can beat them there."

The path leading back to the house was rough and up a steep hillside all the way. For one to attempt to run the entire distance seemed almost madness, but summoning all her strength, she dashed up the tortuous way under the great trees, whose dense foliage made the path so dark that she could scarcely see it. She had traversed it so frequently that she had no trouble in finding her way, although from time to time she slipped on a round stone which rolled and almost tripped her; vines and low-hung branches of the trees interfered, but she pressed on without slackening her pace. Once an ominous growl from some unknown animal broke the stillness a few yards in front of her, but the dog—her loyal protector, dashed away after the beast that had given the warning and she ran on, her breath coming in gasps and her temples throbbing.

"I'll never make it; I'll have to stop. No, if I lose a single minute I will be too late—they may be there already; I've only a little way to go now," she said as she placed both hands over her heart, which was beating so furiously that it seemed as if it would burst, feeling the hot blood surge against

her cheeks and the perspiration stream down from her forehead. A sprained ankle, caused by a rolling stone, did not deter her and the sharp end of a broken bough cruelly pierced her arm, leaving a crimson stain, but she took no heed.

At last the summit was reached; the house was only a hundred yards away. She tried to raise her voice and call her father, for she fancied she could detect the dim forms of the horsemen approaching the house from the road, but her panting breath admitted of no audible words. She expected to fall dead when she reached the doorway.

"But I will save father and thwart the purposes of those fiends after all," was her consoling thought.

The dog preceded Angenette, leaping through the door in such a manner that Clifton knew something unusual was going on about the place somewhere. He rushed to the door and looked out, but he heard nothing; presently he saw a woman hastening toward the house and he ran to meet her, not knowing who she was. The girl fell upon his shoulder, breathing as if in agony. He thought she had been frightened by a wild beast, or possibly a hunter had chanced to meet her as she came through the woods. It was a moment of black bewilderment. Angenette pointed dramatically to the road, just as the sound of horses' hoofs reached them. Then in an instant, as if by a flash of lightning, he knew what it all meant, for he had anticipated a visit from the Bald Knobbers, knowing that he would sooner or later be called upon to give an account of his actions and seeming antipathy.

Drexel and his gang stood in the road a few minutes counseling after they dismounted and tied their horses, giving Angenette time to recover and her father a chance to make preparations for defense.

"You steal out the back way, hide in the woods and let me talk to them," suggested the girl. "They evidently want you and when they discover that you are not here, they will go away and not do me any harm."

"Darling, death could not come to me in a more welcome manner than when defending you. I'll die over my own hearthstone before they will harm one single hair of your head," said Clifton, fearlessly, as he buckled his broad cartridge belt around him, holding a blue-steel "44" Colt's revolver in a holster on either side.

"You may stay if you wish, but I am going to receive them; they are coming now," the girl said, as she peered through the window. She had become quite composed, but was yet panting from the strain of the rapid climb up the steep hill. She deliberately reached over the door to a rack made of antlers from bucks which she herself had killed, and took down her small Winchester rifle, quickly filling its magazine with sixteen long cartridges, as she motioned for her father to guard the rear entrance to the house.

She appeared in the front door, which was already open, with the rifle thrown easily across her left arm, her right hand on the trigger, just as the leader of the little band started to step upon the

porch, his men remaining behind, scattered about the yard.

"Good evening, gentlemen; may I ask why I am favored by such an unexpected visit? My neighbors, perhaps, have come to serenade me, to show their appreciation of my return home. It is so kind of you," said Angenette, as she drew herself up to full height with a proud toss of her stately head.

"No; we forgot our musical instruments, and since we are not especially noted for our vocal abilities, I guess there'll be no serenading this time; but I am glad to see you back again, and I decided to come over and tell you how glad I really am," said Wade Drexel, completely taken off his guard.

"You are very considerate, I am sure."

"We've not very much time to waste tonight, so I'll proceed at once to tell you why I am here. The fact is you have already promised to marry me, as you may possibly remember. I want to give you one more chance. I brought my friends along to assist us across the border and help us celebrate the event. They say they will give us a great charivari. I didn't know but that you had changed your mind since we last met," continued Drexel, yearningly.

"I had sooner become the wife of the devil himself; you had my answer long ago, which was final; my mind has never changed and never will," returned Angenette with acrimony.

Drexel laughed a hard, hollow, cynical laugh, and said, jeeringly:

"If what I've heard is true, you are planning to marry a worse man."

"I don't care anything about what you have heard," she said with energy.

"Well, I'll tell you not only what I have heard, but what I can prove by all the men here and many more, some of them your own neighbors, too. The leader in the raid on the Baird home the other night was none other than Bernard Westbrook. You don't believe it, I know, but he is already under arrest and is likely to be hanged without trial by a posse determined to see that justice is done and the country ridden of all such degenerate rakes as he."

"None of your aspersions on that man. I'm tired of your contemptible insinuations. You are a colossal liar, and a scoundrel of the deepest dye. It is more likely to turn out that you were the leader in that outrageous affair than any one else," returned the girl, contemptuously.

"Mr. Deputy Sheriff, show the lady the return of the warrant, maybe she'll believe us when she sees the magistrate's seal on the document which shows that the man she believes to be so damned good has been put in jail on a charge of murder in the first degree on two counts," said Drexel, as one of his men drew out an official envelope, containing the paper showing the return of the warrant as he had said. A dark-lantern was flashed on the paper, which was held close enough for the girl to read. She shrugged her shoulders and hung her head. She knew there had been treachery somewhere.

"I've no doubt but that you are villainous enough to do what this paper purports has been done, but he will not be in jail long, and as for you and your

crowd of blackmailers, there will be a day of reckoning—the tables will be turned; don't forget that this revenge and spite business is a game at which two can play," flashed Angenette in a voice that went to Drexel's heart like an arrow, but the conflict of soul did not last long.

It was a moment of unutterable suspense. Then two of the Bald Knobbers laughed simultaneously. It was a laugh to freeze the blood, and one of them said:

"The gal 'pears ter be kind o' sassy like, eh? Don't 'pear ter be afeard o' we'uns."

"No; I'm not afraid of any such cowardly vultures as you, and I hasten to assure you that your absence will be far more appreciated than your presence."

"We've not come so much to see you," resumed Drexel at last, "as the old man, who does not deign to associate with us any more—don't seem to appreciate our society, so we've come for the purpose of meting out a little chastisement to him, which will remind him that this organization of the country's best citizens still exists and will not stand for any criticism by him or any other old reprobate. Now, my fine lady, I will make you a final proposition: if you will marry me I will send these men back, and the old man will be spared the torture we have planned to give him, which will consist of the skin being split with rawhides, and salt and quicklime applied to the wounds. He will also be required to show how much of the Indian's grit he has by walking barefoot over coals of fire. Not only will we

spare him this torture, but we will use our influence in securing Bernard Westbrook's release, which we have the power to effect if we so desire. Now, don't answer until you have thought twice. It will be more serious with you than I have intimated if you refuse, for I have plans also regarding you which you will learn of after we get through with the old man."

He shot a speculative glance at her and a flash of fearful meaning came from her eyes as she looked at the brutal, grave, self-assured man before her, and she returned furiously, defiantly :

"I'll stand here and fight until I drop dead before I will as much as permit your crime-stained hands to pollute me with a touch. If my father is tortured by you barbarians it will be after half of your band of outlaws are lying before this door—dead. Now, go or I'll drop you in your tracks!"

Stung by the taunt, the big, lowering rascal was about to reply, taking a step forward threateningly.

Angenette stepped just inside the door and behind the casement, which partly concealed her. The men behind Drexel thought this was a signal to enter the house to hunt out the man they had come to torture.

There was the clear click of the hammer on the rifle as it was drawn back. Angenette raised the gun to her shoulder with the ease and steadiness of a trained soldier. A long streak of flame cut the darkness, followed by a deafening report, and a bullet tore through Drexel's hat, inflicting a slight scalp wound.

He turned and fled from the porch, believing that he had received his death wound, and so confused that he gave no orders for his men to advance to the attack. They had come expecting a fight with Clifton, for he was known to be a man of dauntless courage and unswerving tenacity, but they had not counted upon having to face a gun in the hands of a fearless woman whose aim was as deadly as that of any sharpshooter in the regular army, for she had been known to drive a nail with a rifle shot at fifty yards. Remembering this, the men under Drexel's command, many of whom had seen service in the army, would not raise a hand against the Clifton home without orders from him.

Wilfred Clifton, who several times during the conversation between Angenette and Drexel could hardly restrain himself from rushing out from his hiding place and shooting the audacious leader down, hastened to the window on the side of the house where the girl stood and pointed two revolvers at the intruders as they retreated half way across the yard and halted as if they meant to return to the house; but they were encouraged to move on by a fusillade, the bullets from which felled two of the gang, tearing up the gravel walk at the feet of others and whistled close around them. The rifle and both revolvers were soon emptied by the defenders and new cartridges were put in place.

The Bald Knobbers, who only recently had several clashes with the militia, believed that the house contained some of these dangerous opponents, judging from the furious fire which poured from it, and

after firing several rounds into the house, they hastened to their horses, carrying their wounded comrades, quickly mounted and fled in different directions, the bullets screaming through the air so near them that they leaned low over the pommels of their saddles until out of range.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

Long ago when knighthood was in flower, someone said that love would find a way. This sometimes involved the trying ordeal of crossing moats and scaling the outer wall of a battlemented castle tower and stealing some trembling princess from her boudoir, then flying on mettled chargers with her to some mountain fastness or across the border into a safe region; or, perchance, in finding the way to gratify his love, the cavalier would be compelled to impale a few rivals upon his lance, or in some other knightly fashion dispose of whatever happened to be a hindering cause to love's achievement.

Such obstacles as these, modern gallants do not have to contend with, but a method of communication frequently employed in medieval times by lovers, that known as the "language of flowers," was successfully used by Bernard Westbrook and Angenette Clifton in the Ozarks far, far away from the land where the custom originated.

Angenette had never read how many a lovelorn maiden had thrown little bouquets from her window to her Lancelot sighing some love ditty beneath it, each blossom representing a precious thought; but she was taught in some of the mysterious ways which the tender heart of youth imbibes, where and how we can not say.

The night after the visit of the Bald Knobbers to the Clifton home, Angenette scarcely slept, knowing that they had formed a conspiracy against Westbrook in their determination to get him out of the way. How was she to help him? What, if anything, could be done? Had she not seen the undisputed power of the mysterious organization manifested in many ways? Had not warrants been frequently obtained for the arrest of some of its members, charging them with various crimes, and had not the officers of the law in that vicinity, who were in league with the Bald Knobbers, refused to prosecute the offenders regardless of how serious the offenses with which they were charged? Or, if an arrest was made and the culprit brought in for trial, was not the hearing before a jury composed of Bald Knobbers, which invariably gave the accused his freedom? What chance would Bernard Westbrook have, then, at the hands of such men? Did they not all hate him, principally because of the efforts of Wade Drexel, who had incited them against him by maintaining that the attorney was a detective in the employ of the government? If they conspired to accuse him of the tragedy at the Baird home, could they not get hundreds of men for witnesses against him, and try him before a jury composed of their own number? His trial would be a mere farce, a travesty on justice, with the worst possible result. Besides, he would be subjected to all sorts of insulting, cruel and inhuman treatment while in prison. She also remembered Drexel's intimations that the law in his case might be entirely ignored and the

helpless prisoner taken out and brutally hanged without a hearing. This was most likely to occur since the rebuff of the outlaws by her a few hours previous.

"Such thoughts are horrible, but they are not to be ignored. What if they should do that terrible deed tonight while there is no friend to aid him? How can I sleep, knowing that he is in that filthy jail? God! what can be done? Is there no way for immediate help? Why is fate so unkind? But they will not take him from me, and nothing can estrange us any more," she sobbed.

Dawn was scarcely breaking when Angenette mounted Cricket and rode away toward the little brick prison beyond Yoakum Ridges, near Crane Creek. Her troubled face wore also an expression of determination and invincibleness. She felt that this was the crucial test in her life. If she was ever to do anything worth while, it was then. Her first mission was to make sure whether Westbrook had met the fate that the Bald Knobbers had indicated was in store for him. She urged her pony up hill and down, leaving a trail of white dust behind. She dashed up to the jail, leaped to the ground and left Cricket standing untied. She pounded fiercely upon the narrow iron door. No one came to let her in and she gave it another shake with greater vehemence.

"Who's thar?" came a gruff voice from within.

"No matter who—come let me in—I want to see some one—be quick about it."

"Aw, a woman, eh? Some feller's wife has fetched him his breakfast, I s'pose. Wait till I shet this cell ep, an' I'll let yo' in, madam."

"Don't be all day about it—I can't wait."

"Comin' now, madam."

But it seemed many minutes before she heard the shuffle of ambling feet toward the door and still many more before the big key in the jailer's hand turned the ponderous, rusty lock and the door swung open.

"Whut mout be on yer mind—anything we kin do fer yo', madam?" inquired Lake Batewell, the old jailer, as he stroked his long, King Lear brand of beard.

"Is there a gentleman in here by the name of Westbrook?"

"West—West—brook—lemme see?"

"Have you so many prisoners that you don't know their names?"

"Oh, yes, he wuz fetched in yere yistiddy. They sed he knowed more 'bout thet affair over to Stephen Baird's than he seemed willin' ter tell. Yes, I know the man all right, but I didn't quite cotch his name at fust."

Angenette felt greatly relieved upon learning that Westbrook was safe.

"Did any one inquire about him during the night?" she asked.

"They wuz a gang stopped yere 'long 'twixt midnight and day axin fer to see 'im, but I told 'em that th' fust man what teched th' jail door would die with his boots on."

"Did they want to hang him?"

"Never sed, but I cac'klated ez how thet mout b'en theyr idee. No pris'ner can be taken frum this heyr jail 'thout a paper frum th' jedge er proper authority, I tell ye, madam. I ain't b'en jailer heyr fifteen y'ars the fo'teenth uv las' December fer nuthin'."

"Then you won't let them get him?"

"Don't be afeard."

"It's so kind of you. I am so thankful that you kept them out last night."

"Yo' know him, I reckon?"

"Yes, a very dear friend of mine. May I see him at once?"

"Don't know ez hit's any harm fer yo' ter look at 'im, but I got orders not to let nobuddy talk to 'im."

"Whose orders?"

"The fellers whut putt him in yere."

"Did you know them?"

"Most o' 'em."

"Why shouldn't he be allowed to talk to anyone? Has he not such a right under the law?"

"Dunno hardly, may be no law g'inst hit, but I don't like ter do hit when I promised not to."

"I must see him and talk to him."

"Waal, fer a little while this onct, ef you'll not be too long, but I can't 'low hit any more, fer them fellers would find hit out an' then I'd hev ter settle with 'em—not thet I'm afeard o' the hull bunch, but it wouldn't be ezackly a pleasant job. Come on through yere."

"Dearest, is it you? I knew you would come," exclaimed Westbrook when he saw Angenette, who ran up to his cell and clasped his hands, which were extended between the bars of the heavy iron door. She tried to be brave, but the sight of the one she loved languishing in a miserable cell when he did not deserve any punishment, and the look out of his sad eyes and the paleness of his face, upon which rested unutterable gloom, caused her lips to tremble and a mist to gather before her eyes.

"Don't let it trouble you, dear," the prisoner said. "I will get out of it all right if I am given a chance, for it is but a vile mockery, a case of spite and revenge, as you already know."

"What can I do to save you? Tell me something—anything!"

"Just love me and wait—that's all."

"I will get you out and put the cowardly wretches in your place, or I'll know whether justice is dead in this state or not," said the girl, with feeling.

"I have no fears for the end, for murder will out. No matter how great may be the influence of the Bald Knobbers, the attention of the state authorities will be attracted by the enormity of such a crime as has been committed here, and justice will be done, but I know of no immediate relief. No bond can be given under a charge of this kind, so I will be compelled to remain in jail until the date of my trial; but we must not be discouraged, until the silver lining of this cloud becomes visible, which it must some day," said Westbrook, *reassuringly*.

"If there is anything I can do tell me now, for the jailer says I can't talk to you any more."

"I think of nothing you could do at present except to notify my attorney friend in St. Louis. Here is his card. Write him all about it. Maybe he can help us if we can't help ourselves before he can act."

"But I must talk to you some way. Why not through the flowers? You know I told you yesterday what their language was. Will you remember what each one will be the symbol of?" she whispered so that the jailer could not hear.

"Yes, I remember."

"Waal, hate ter do hit, but I've got the pris'ners ter look a'ter, so I guess yo'd better come 'long with me now, madam," remarked the old jailer.

"I'll come twice each day to see you whether I can talk to you or not," said Angenette, with a lamentable attempt at a cheerful smile.

"Don't worry—just be patient; it will all be right in time."

"But it is too bad that you have to stay in this horrible place."

"After the sunshine of your angelic face has illuminated it, even this dirty jail will remain bright until you come again," returned Westbrook, enthusiastically.

Her heart was too full to reply as she turned and walked slowly toward the door, but he read in her eyes the love and pathos mingled there and smiled as if it was but a trivial matter, although he well knew what a bloodthirsty villain was seek-

ing his ruin. He had surmised when old Lake Batewell was called out in the night in answer to a summons by a band of men, that he was the one wanted and also who the visitors were. What assurance had he that they would not come in larger force the following night and batter down the jail door? Who would protect him? The old jailer and his aids could not. But Westbrook was brave and would face death like a martyr if need be.

"It may be this will prove to be our last day together here, but my soul will refuse to part from hers. It will seek through the worlds for her. The grave may close between us, but eternity itself can not part us," he mused as he paced up and down his narrow cell.

Angenette had refrained from recounting to him the story of her exciting experience of the night before, knowing that it would add to his discomfort. She was afraid he would inquire how she knew he had been seized and thrown into jail. She did not know with what deep concern he thought of her during the dreadful moments of the visit of the Bald Knobbers to her home. So strong was this feeling that she had need of him, that he would have gone to her had he been at liberty.

As Angenette rode away from the jail with a heart heavily laden with sorrow and pain, she conceived the idea of obtaining convincing evidence against the real perpetrators of the crime with which Bernard Westbrook had been unjustly charged. She would lay this evidence before some state authority, compel the arrest of the gang and

the liberation of the former. Turning her horse in the direction of the Baird residence, she reached there within an hour's ride. Finding that family in a pitiable condition, she at once set about ministering to the needs of the survivors as best she could. Her sympathetic nature was always aroused at the sight of suffering, and her neighbors had long been used to her little acts of kindness and charitable deeds. Her heart went out to the bereaved and the distressed. At times she seemed to hear a cry of sorrow which deepened her broad love for suffering humanity—the cry that has saddened the ages since the time the children of Israel sat down by the waters of Babylon to weep.

The stricken family was greatly in need of just such a tender nurse and such a strong-minded woman to sympathize and advise. Stephen Baird and his daughter, the wife of Sam West, two of the victims, still lingered, not yet conscious. There was little hope of their recovery, although the spark of life seemed hard to extinguish. It was a scene to cause the most courageous to waver and the stoutest heart to weaken, but with a steady hand she did what she could, and when she left, promised to return frequently and continue to relieve their sufferings so long as necessary.

With the most careful consideration for the wounded hearts of the relatives of the stricken family, Angenette adroitly gathered what evidence she could regarding the case, and returned home greatly encouraged at the progress she had made. That afternoon she started back to the jail with delica-

cies for Westbrook's supper, when she met two strange men whom she eyed keenly. She had been wishing all day she could hear of a sheriff or some officer in whom she could confide, but she feared to make her wishes known to any one she did not believe could be trusted implicitly, for it seemed that most of her neighbors were in league with the Bald Knobbers and any plan she might divulge would go straight to them and spoil everything.

In reining up his horse to turn out of the road in order to let Angenette pass, one of the men carelessly threw back his coat, revealing a large silver-plated star—the unmistakable badge of an officer of the law. This was her chance, and she unhesitatingly accosted the man by saying that she was in possession of information that would interest him if he had come to look into the Baird-West murder and that she would be glad to assist him. But she was not to be taken off her guard, thereby making a grave mistake, so she insisted that the men produce proper credentials as to their identity and authority as officers. She had guessed rightly, the men declaring that they had come to run down the guilty parties and to break up Bald Knobberism at any cost.

"The state of Missouri is backing us. Governor Francis has already sent Adjutant-General Jameson into this country to ascertain what the true situation is, and the entire state militia will be called out or martial law declared if necessary to accomplish the end. Many officers are now arriving in these mountains upon the same mission and we *mean business*," said the stranger.

"Had you heard that a man has already been placed in jail charged with being a leader in the mob that attacked the Baird home?" the girl asked.

"We have as yet heard but few facts, having just arrived, but we are anxious to get a clew and begin work at once."

• Then Angenette told the officers what she knew of the crime, the history of Bald Knobberism and the story of Westbrook's persecutions with such earnestness and forcefulness that the men became greatly interested, not for a moment doubting her authenticity, and they made copious notes in their memorandum-books, from time to time, during the course of her story.

"Why are you so deeply concerned in this? Was the unfortunate family relatives of yours?" one of the men hazarded.

"The victims were neighbors, and had done nothing to deserve such an awful fate. Besides, it is but just that the perpetrators of such revolting crimes should be compelled to pay the penalty provided by law; but more than that—I dislike to see an innocent person suffer as a result of pure spite work and jealousy. There is a man in that dismal jail yonder," she said, pointing dramatically across the ridge, "who has been imprisoned for no crime—simply for the purpose of getting him out of the way—of whom?—the lawless Bald Knobbers, who themselves committed the crime with which he is charged. I do not ask you to take my word for it, but to consider the facts."

Then she told how an alibi could be proved to establish the fact that Westbrook was not within many miles of the Baird home the night of the tragedy. She told of the visit of the gang to her own home and what threats they made.

"Now, gentlemen, what I tell you is the truth, before God. That same band of men appeared at the jail a few hours after they made the attempt to invade our home and demanded that the prisoner, whose life they had threatened, be brought out. It is expected that they will return tonight in greater force and compel the keepers of the jail to give him up. Won't you protect him? Can't something be done to save him? Won't you go to the jail with me and get the facts yourselves?" she pleaded with the men, as she looked at them with tearful eyes and helpless misery.

So deeply impressed were the officers that they turned and rode to the jail, one on either side of Angenette, questioning her on all the trivial details of the crime, the conspiracy, and, in short, all she knew of the supposed perpetrators of the crimes that had stirred the community. When they reached the jail, they discovered that what the girl had told them was true. One of the officers who talked with the prisoner proved to be an acquaintance, having formerly lived in St. Louis, and he promised to aid Westbrook in every way possible.

After delivering the supper and a little bouquet of wild flowers to the prisoner, Angenette whispered to him that the officers had promised to protect him from the mob if it should come again.

"I have a good pony and I can ride anywhere; can't I do something?" she said to the officers in offering her services to assist them, while they silently applauded her courage.

"We have decided that it were better to protect the jail tonight against a possible attack by the enemies of this prisoner, and we will need all the special officers in the vicinity that we can get to assist us. If you will be kind enough to do so, you might help notify them to meet us here at a specified hour this evening, not later than eight o'clock," one of the officers said.

The girl was greatly elated over the prospect and started to mount Cricket when she said:

"Give your orders quickly and I am off. It is late and we can't afford to take any chances."

Angenette and the two officers rode away in different directions. Other detectives were found and when the appointed hour arrived fourteen officers and their deputies were gathered at the jail, heavily armed. They placed four pickets at a safe distance from the jail with orders to let no one come near. Two shots were to be fired if any one tried to approach against their orders.

After seeing that enough men had gathered at the jail to protect Westbrook, Angenette rode home. The excitement of the day and the previous night had begun to undermine her strength, and she sank to sleep like a weary child.

Westbrook knew that he was indebted entirely to Angenette for protection from the mob and his

heart went out to her as never before. He could not sleep, and the night wore on as he paced up and down in his cell or stood looking at the sky through the little narrow window high above him, the small panes of which were so thickly covered with dust that but little light was admitted even during the day; but a small corner had been broken in one of the panes which permitted him to see a brilliant star-point in the sky. He watched it as if fascinated; never before had a star appeared so beautiful and so holy. This silent, far-away companion seemed to speak to him and to cheer him, holding forth hope. At last it moved away, leaving the trackless fields of star-land without a trace or a scar, and he felt that a friend had gone, which fact left him more lonely, as the wind sobbed in the trees and the mysterious night noises made themselves heard.

"Angenette is the star of my life; she fills my world with radiance, but she is more constant than the one gleaming yonder, for it has withdrawn its cheering rays when I needed it most, while she—the changeless north-star of my soul—is most glorious when my night of life is the darkest," said the lonely prisoner, moodily.

Shortly before midnight two shots rang out. Westbrook then heard a number of men rush out from the office of the jailer, one of whom was giving orders in a low, quick voice. The pickets dropped back and a line was formed a few yards from the

jail. The officers could see, over the open field, nearly two hundred yards away, the dark figures of many men swiftly approaching.

The heart of the prisoner was beating audibly for he knew what it all meant. He heard a voice say:

"Don't let them come any nearer. Begin firing and don't cease until every man has dispersed. Retreat inside the jail if too closely pressed."

Then there was such a continuous roar of guns that one would have imagined a company of soldiers had suddenly attacked the enemy. The fire was returned and many bullets were heard to flatten against the jail or go screaming through the air above it. But it soon ceased; the Bald Knobbers, although in much greater numbers than they were on the previous night, realized that the force of men at the jail was too strong for them, and protected as the officers were by the brick walls, it would be next to impossible to dislodge them, so the attacking party retreated precipitately into the woods, and Westbrook breathed more easily.

"Thank God for the love of such a woman," he repeated over and over.

Angenette was at the jail early the next morning and when she learned of the attack of the mob the previous night and how it had been repulsed, she felt that her labors had not been all in vain.

"I will continue to work, dear heart, for the end is now in sight. Have no fear. I am dying to talk to you; but some day there will be no one to forbid me; in the meantime my love will grow in

silence." She had written this on a little piece of paper, which she placed in a jonquil, but the prisoner nearly missed it when he looked over the beautiful bouquet she had brought that morning.

For the next few days Angenette's time was wholly taken between her work at the Baird home with the wounded survivors of the raid and in her attentions to Westbrook. Twice each day she brought him delicacies to eat which she had prepared herself, and always there was the cheering, message-bearing bouquet of fresh flowers, spring's choicest blossoms—love's purveyors.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TABLES TURNED

After returning home from the jail, Angenette felt a relaxation following the excitement of the day and as she sat alone in the twilight she buried her face in her hands and wept like a child. Then she censured herself severely for giving way to her weakness, although the one for whom she wept had said that such an overflowing of the fountain of the feelings should not be regarded as a weakness. Remembering a letter Westbrook had written in reply to one she wrote stating that at times during his long absence she felt as if she would be compelled to give vent to her feelings through tears, she secured it and took comfort from its pages.

"What makes life so remarkably precious to man is not his love for a single pleasure or beauty, but the enjoyment which is received from the many influences of a vast number of comparatively little benefactors for which he has very firm attachments," the letter read. "It does not now occur to my mind that there is anything more beautiful amidst the animating, yet inanimate, benefactors of life than those mysterious ministers—tears; nothing takes such deep hold of the inner man, his sympathies and his holier nature. Tears are the com-

panions of our existence. With the meek little sufferer they enter upon the intricate and by-crossing pathways of this wonderful, yet gradually opening world, and they do not leave us until all mystery has passed away, until the variously shifting scenes have all been exhibited, and the curtain of death has shut us out from whatever of joy or sorrow, of pleasure or pain, we may have experienced. Tears accompany our hopes, mingle with our sorrows, thus bind and strengthen our patience. They often have a flow with our affections and mark our pity; they speak in our gratitude, chasten our love, and arise with our joyousness; they are among our divinest inheritances. Deprived of them, our misfortunes and troubles would alike be aggravated, our sympathies would be examined with distrust, and heart would not speak unto heart, as it now does, with its irresistible and revivifying language. The true state of our characters would be hidden under the mists of an unwelcome hypocrisy, and every man might assume a character for every change of scene, if better feelings did not step in before the desires for one's own interests."

"These words are doubtless true, but I will have to bear up better than this; I must not let him know that I have no more resistance than to spend my nights in weeping. I will be strong—I must be brave. I will work, work, and will not be so foolish any more," said Angenette as she slowly folded the letter.

In the chain of evidence she had been gradually welding, just one link was lacking to complete all

that was necessary to locate and convict the murderers who raided the Baird home. This work must be done at once. The detectives who had been greatly aided by Angenette were still looking to her untiring efforts to unearth still more valuable information. The critical hour was approaching; they must strike at once or never.

"If fortune does not forsake me at the last moment, one poor prisoner will be released and others placed in the cell he vacates before sunset," Angenette said as she started toward the Baird home on her usual morning visit. She was gratified to find upon reaching there that the wife of Sam West, one of the murdered men, who had been nearly killed the night of the raid, was recovering and had regained consciousness. This heroic woman volunteered to tell her gentle nurse the details of the crime up to where she was struck down.

"But do you have any idea who any of them were?" asked Angenette impatiently.

"The man whose mask I tore off was Red Doak and I am positive that another was Wade Drexel, although I could not see his face. I would not venture a guess as to who any of the others were, but one of them was about as burly in appearance as Buck Amick," gasped the suffering woman, and then grew too weak to give further information.

Angenette soon mounted her pony and sped away to the officers, telling them what she had discovered.

"That is all we need, Miss Clifton; we will proceed to run the men down at once, for we have sus-

pected them and have them located, together with their associates, so no time will be lost," said one of the officers, then adding, "We have also thoroughly investigated the case of Mr. Westbrook, and, finding that it is absurd to connect him with the crime, we have secured an order for his release, which will be served at once."

"Oh, how good you are! How can I repay you?" shouted the girl exultantly, while her wonderful kindly eyes beamed in charity upon them.

"You have already repaid us tenfold," he replied.

Without further words Angenette ran Cricket over hill and through hollow to tell Westbrook of the good news.

"Why can't I talk to him? He is to be released anyway; do let me tell him first," she entreated old Lake Batewell upon her arrival at the jail.

"Hain't heerd of no sich orders, madam—guess yo' air mistookin, fer I would a seed 'em first, but if hit'll please yo' any I'll tell the man whut yo' say."

When informed of the order of his release, Westbrook was not so dubious of the report as was the old jailer.

"At last, thank God! I know it's true and that it all came about through the efforts of that queenliest, bravest and best of women in the world," he said to himself.

Soon an officer arrived at the jail bearing the order demanding Westbrook's release, the *nolle prosequi* having resulted from the fact that no evi-

dence could be secured to warrant holding him for trial.

When the cell door was opened the prisoner, whose face was now careworn and his eyes troubled, was met by a pair of soft arms which were fondly entwined about his neck, and he clasped Angenette in a warm embrace. Neither spoke; and they soon emerged from the old grimy jail, hand in hand, out into the soft sunshine and the sweet air. The skies smiled above them, and there was music upon the leaves—all for their enjoyment, it seemed.

As he listened to the details of Angenette's work in connection with the case, how she had secured the evidence to prove his innocence and had enlisted the services of the detectives in his behalf, thereby saving him from the vengeance of a jealous desperado who bore in his heart the hate of hell against the man he had imprisoned, Westbrook said:

"I shall spend the rest of my life thanking you and trying to make you happy and myself worthy of the love of such a noble woman."

But Angenette did not feel that she had done anything extraordinary and was only sorry that she could not do more for him.

That afternoon Wade Drexel, Red Doak, Buck Amick, Paul Tice and the other Bald Knobbers who had been present when the Baird home was raided, were riding down White River valley, their movements being watched by sheriffs and detectives who had followed them from where the road forks near the mouth of Beaver Creek. Although the gang

did not expect to be placed under arrest, they entertained suspicions that they were being watched, and Drexel, having been notified of Westbrook's release from jail, believed that he would be accused of the crime by his hated rival. Consequently, he had notified his associates to meet him in Rocky Canyon at sunset, where they were to plan for possible emergencies. Drexel believed that Red Doak, whom he knew had been recognized by one of the victims on the night of the raid, would surrender if closely pressed, and turn state's evidence against the rest of the party. If this should be found to be true, he intended dealing with Red as the oath provided for—death to all traitors in the organization.

Upon learning that the officers were intending to make an effort to place the outlaws under arrest, Westbrook buckled two revolvers around him, mounted a horse and joined the officers, offering his services. He was at once sworn in as a deputy sheriff, for the undertaking was a hazardous one and they realized it, consequently availed themselves of the services of anyone they could secure who was willing to risk a battle with the Bald Knobbers with the chances in favor of the latter on account of their superior numbers and better knowledge of the country.

The officers, seeing the gang assembling at the mouth of the canyon, deployed in different directions and approached Windy Pass from both the east and the west sides, where they had decided that *the men* could be the most easily surrounded and *captured*, for information had been obtained to the

effect that the men wanted sometimes held council in a densely wooded glen just beyond the pass. There is where they evidently intended to hold their meeting that night. Each member of the gang waited at the mouth of the canyon until the entire number expected had arrived, so that the trip up the canyon could be made together. They had little fear of being detected anywhere in this secluded gulch, so they ascended it somewhat incautiously, Drexel riding ahead, his men following in single file along the narrow, winding trail. The officers had been given ample time to take positions behind sheltering rocks before the gang reached Windy Pass. They could be heard for quite a distance, jesting and swearing as they rode up the canyon.

"So the feller we putt in jail was let out, eh? We ortn't tuk no chanct with 'im in the fust place. Drexel won't be so foolish any more ez to run the resk uv him gittin' away, will you, Wade?" called out one of the desperadoes from the middle of the line.

"If I ever get him in my hands again you will see what will happen. But I thought there would be no trouble in carrying out our plan before," returned Drexel.

"I've heerd said ez how hit's best never to putt off tel tomorry whut ort ter be did terday," added another.

"We'll decide at the meeting upon some plan to get rid of him. We can't afford to fail any more, for now that he is free he will go to work

and do us some kind of mischief—maybe try to have us arrested,” remarked the leader insolently, which elicited a contagious laugh all along the line.

“I’d like ter see th’ color o’ th’ gazook’s eyes what could arrest me, wouldn’t you, Red?” ejaculated another.

“They’s no danger; we’ve got everything on our side an’ there’s too many of we’uns to be handled, anyway,” replied Red Doak.

“I cac’late ez how they ain’t shurruffs and detecatives ernuff in the hull state ter corral we’uns,” rejoined another desperado.

“Don’t know ez they’ll do much good at the job, but they’ll make some fuss about this little business we all wuz mixed up in, and don’t yous fergit it. I say we all orter be purty keerful an’ not git too sassy and reckless er we all air likely ter have ter do more shootin’ than we done t’other night. I’m tellin’ yo’ th’ damned truth, men,” advised Buck Amick.

“Well, we’ll not fret about it till the time comes. It’s not necessary to worry about the bridge until we get to it, you know. Besides we’ll leave it to the chief, who has made no mistakes yet. He’ll pull us through, I guess, boys,” said Paul Tice, encouragingly.

“But sun’tin’s got ter be decided on right now, an’ the chief ain’t whar he kin help us out enny,” said the man in the rear dejectedly.

Just before the head horseman reached the pass a dozen sheriffs, deputies and detectives suddenly

rose from their positions behind rocks on either side of the trail not a hundred yards away, some with repeating rifles, others with a revolver in either hand.

"Hands up!" several shouted simultaneously, carrying out pre-arranged plans.

The Bald Knobbers were taken completely by surprise, but most of them drew guns in one hand while they reined their horses with the other.

"Retreat and each man save himself behind the rocks," the leader shouted as they whirled around on the trail, some of the horses stumbling and nearly falling down the steep side of the mountain, for the trail at this place was narrow. But they soon saw that their retreat was cut off and that they would be compelled to fight their way through a line of well-armed men if they regained the mouth of the canyon. They quickly but vainly scanned the walls of the canyon on either side to ascertain if there was a declivity in the rocks that would admit of their passage, but to their dismay every possible place of escape was guarded and they realized that they had been trapped.

The officers began firing when it became evident that the Bald Knobbers would not surrender without a fight. A few shots were fired in return, but the former were protected by the big rocks which jutted out from the summits of the sierras on either side of the canyon, and no one was hit. It would have been easy for the officers to have picked the men off their horses; but they preferred taking them alive, if possible, believing that information

could be gained from some of them which would lead to the arrest of many more of their associates and in more successful efforts in breaking up the organization.

A horse was felled under the head horseman as they descended into the canyon, blocking further retreat. Then the order was given to dismount, to turn the horses loose and at once seek shelter behind bowlders.

Some of the officers sought positions nearer the desperadoes, who began shooting in every direction as the former closed in. The fire was furious for a time until the magazines of the repeating rifles and the cylinders of the "six-shooters" were emptied.

Two of the Bald Knobbers had been severely wounded and one of the officers was hit, but he was not dangerously hurt. A bullet struck squarely against the gray wall of rock that sheltered Westbrook, flattened and dropped to the ground, leaving a dark trace of lead behind. Soon another shattered the edge of the stone and fine particles of flint were scattered in every direction, several of them cutting into Westbrook's face, causing crimson drops of blood to trickle in a zigzag manner down his cheeks. Then the deputy sheriff nearest him threw up his hands with a yell as if he had been mortally wounded, as a leaden ball stung him on the right arm, tearing away the flesh.

Around the bowlders concealing the Bald Knobbers the dust was continuously plowed up by a rain of bullets, which accounted for the fact that only

now and then a head was seen to rise up behind its shelter, to be as quickly withdrawn, after which, for a time, the rock was enveloped in a little cloud of smoke from a rifle or a revolver. One of the gang was seen to rise up and fall back before he could aim and fire, the missile from a sheriff's rifle having found lodgment in his shoulder. Then another's hat was swept away by a bullet from a detective's revolver and a stain of blood appeared upon the black hair of the desperado. The walls of the deep canyon loudly echoed the sound of the guns, and when the firing first began a hundred big birds of prey of various types were startled from the cliffs and sailed away to return no more. The frightened horses, riderless and some of them wounded, dashed down the side of the deep gorge, tearing through the dense underbrush, neighing piteously, having scattered in all directions.

The firing ceased at nightfall, which is not long delayed in Rocky Canyon after the sun begins his descent behind the trees on the ridge to the west. The officers tried to compel a surrender before night, fearing that some of the men would escape, but a determined effort resulted in abandoning the idea, for their furious charge was repulsed, causing considerable blood to be lost on both sides.

"We will keep them there until their ammunition is exhausted or they are starved out," said one of the besiegers.

The hope of the Bald Knobbers lay in expected help from their friends, believing that someone would undoubtedly learn of their perilous position and would summon aid.

"We'll stay with 'em, boys, fer we'll git help by mornin'; four hundred members of our organization will be on their way here afore midnight. Then we'll give them fellers up yander all the fightin' they'r lookin' fer," announced Buck Amick as he bound a big bandanna around his wounded wrist.

"Hit'll be purty hard on us thet's hurt to stay yere till mornin'. Couldn't we make a dash and git out som'ers while hit's dark?" inquired one of the gang who was nursing a broken shoulder.

But this plan, which was later adopted, was as quickly abandoned when the canyon was lighted up on all sides by great fires, lit by the officers, which they agreed should be kept well replenished all night with wood, so that they could detect any efforts to escape that the besieged gang might make. Every one of the men guarding the Bald Knobbers was needed to defend his pass, for their numbers were too few to risk weakening the lines, so no one could be spared to go for food or water; and the night wore on with both sides suffering from wounds, hunger and thirst. Occasionally a Bald Knobber tried a shot at some of the besiegers as they worked about the fires to keep them burning, but no one was injured.

Just before dawn the Bald Knobbers, observing that the wind was blowing strongly toward the main body of officers, conceived the plan of starting a forest fire, which would drive the latter back, thus giving a chance to escape. Several blazes were kindled at the same time, and the fierce flames soon

leaped and roared among the trees. The officers thought that they had been outwitted, but by prompt action and good strategy not one of the gang was permitted to escape. The wall of rocks prevented the flames reaching the main part of the timber, and the fire finally subsided for lack of fuel. The terrible heat resulted, for a time, in intense suffering to all.

Angenette knew that the pursuers and the pursued had met somewhere or Westbrook would have returned by evening. She induced Wilfred Clifton to ride down to the club-house to find out if anything had happened. He could gain no information, but as he was riding back home he saw from the summit of Panther Ridge the reflection from the fires near Windy Pass and supposed that they were beacon lights, either as warnings by the Bald Knobbers or signals for help from the officers. Several members of the mysterious organization were riding up the road that leads around the base of Iron Knob also saw the light from the ridges on either side of Rocky Canyon, but supposing it to be a forest fire, rode on and thought no more of what they had seen.

Wilfred Clifton did not tell Angenette of the incident until the following morning, knowing that it would cause her some worry. Upon hearing of the fire, she set out at once to ascertain the meaning of it.

"Maybe they need assistance and I can do something. If the officers need help, perhaps I can find it out and hunt up some of the militia to aid them. Besides I must know where Bernard is, whether

he is safe," she said as she hastened over the hills and down into White River valley. As she neared Rocky Canyon she heard firing in the vicinity of Windy Pass and knew that her father had not been mistaken regarding what he had seen.

Remembering that the Bald Knobbers had been accustomed to hold meetings in the gulch, she argued that the party trying to arrest them must be on the ridges overlooking the canyon. She discovered a dim wood-path and rode up the ridge from Stony Point until she could get a view of the contested territory. She could see men firing from behind rocks, evidently used for shelter, and upon drawing nearer decided definitely that the officers were upon the summit as she had at first supposed. She approached as near to the pass as possible on horseback, then tied Cricket and laboriously climbed up the side of the ridge until she was near enough to see the men clearly without being observed.

"Yes, there they are. Two poor fellows are evidently badly wounded and must need attention; and there is one of the sheriffs whom I know, and there, too, is Bernard. I must see if he needs anything. I am so glad he has not been hurt," she said as she looked up to the rocks where the officers were sheltered. She detoured southward and ran from tree to tree until she was within a few yards of Westbrook. The sight of blood on his face, which she then detected, made her turn pale, and she called to him:

"Do any of you need anything?"

"My God, how did you get here! This is no place for you. Hurry away or a stray bullet will

hit you, for the air is full of them," replied Westbrook as a leaden ball sang through the air, cutting the leaves from the boughs on the tree under which she stood.

"I have come to see if you need any help. Can't I do something for you or those poor fellows who are injured yonder. It seems that you, too, have been struck," she replied as complacently as if they had been holding a conversation alone in some quiet place.

"You must stay back; they would shoot you should you attempt to come to any of us. I am dying for some water, but we will be able to take them before long for their ammunition is about gone, so I suppose I can stand it until then."

"I'll bring you some water presently, dear," she said as she dashed away down the side of the mountain to a little rill she remembered to have crossed just after leaving Cricket. Not having anything in which to get the water, she made her white sombrero do duty as a canteen by "cupping" in the crown. Soon she returned to the tree where she had talked with Westbrook, who forbade her to come farther. As he dashed away from his hiding place to get the water, a bullet tore up the ground at his feet, but it did not stop him.

"That is a God-send, for my tongue was as dry as powder and my lips were parched until they ached," he said as he heartily imbibed the cooling draught. "Don't risk coming up here again. We will soon have them, anyway."

"Were you hurt much?" she inquired as she washed the blood and smoke stains from his begrimed face.

"Not enough to bother about, especially when there is such work to be done as we have here," he replied coolly.

"I'll be out here somewhere; if you need me, call," she said as she hurried away and Westbrook returned to his post. She knew that by the time she summoned the aid which they were in need of, the fight would likely be over. Besides she did not like to leave Westbrook, fearing he might need her.

Soon the firing abated. The Bald Knobbers, despairing of assistance reaching them and realizing that their ammunition was about exhausted, decided to make a dash for liberty, and if it failed to give up. They had no terrors regarding the law, anyway, believing that they would never be found guilty and punished for their crimes. With a wild yell they leaped down the canyon from rock to rock, those who had not been too severely wounded, firing at the officers who were compelled to leave the rocks which had sheltered them in order to keep the outlaws within range. A furious fusillade greeted them. It was seen that many of their number were too badly injured to follow, and not willing to leave their wounded comrades, even if they themselves could make good their escape, some of the Bald Knobbers suddenly turned and threw up their hands. The officers dashed down and surrounded the desperadoes, disarming them.

But this proved to be no easy task, many of the gang vowing that they would never be taken alive. Desperate hand to hand conflicts resulted, during which considerable injury was inflicted on both sides. Some were overpowered, others lassoed, until all were finally bound and placed under guard.

Westbrook, who had been exchanging shots with Drexel, whom he had succeeded in wounding, rushed upon him, demanding his gun.

"I'll be damned if I do—not to you," he declared as he started to lift the weapon to fire just as a shot from Westbrook's revolver went scorching up his sleeve, causing the outlaw to drop his revolver with a howl of rage and pain.

"I'll never be taken alive by such a damned tenderfoot as you," flashed Drexel as he reached for his long dirk behind in his belt. But Westbrook struck him a heavy blow upon the head with the butt of his big revolver, felling the ruffian to the ground.

Angenette was soon upon the scene, after the outlaws had been handcuffed, binding up the wounds of both friend and foe.

CHAPTER XXIV

FREEDOM REFUSED

News of the capture of the Bald Knobbers spread like wildfire, for the murdering of Sam West and Jim Baird, which had so stirred the whole country, called for punishment. The captured desperadoes composed that portion of the organization which could be classed as outlaws, for the major part of this vast league which extended well into four counties, numbering thousands of men, were opposed to such a raid as was made on the Baird home. So long as the members of this organization remained within the confines of the law, they experienced no trouble, but when some of their number overstepped its bounds, using the power of the order to gratify selfish desires and to give expression to their lawless natures, they brought punishment upon themselves and placed the entire league in bad repute, thus giving additional evidence of the justice of the universal code of retribution which has been in evidence throughout Christendom during the long march of civilization; for the violation of all law, whether civil, physical, moral, or spiritual, implies a penalty from which few escape.

But loyalty to its members was one of the strongest features of this league; those identifying themselves with it swore to assist and protect each

other in any and all emergencies; so there was a great gathering of Bald Knobbers one night, soon after the arrest of the alleged murderers, for the purpose of discussing the situation relative to giving aid to those of their number who had been lodged in jail. It was decided that they would not take chances with the law, but give the prisoners their freedom by force. A plan was subsequently decided upon whereby the jail was to be broken into and the captured Bald Knobbers be given a chance to escape.

The evening set apart for the carrying out of this plan was ideal for the purpose, for it was the time when a terrible electric storm or tornado visited the community, which fact lessened the chances for a fight with the officers at the jail or with the militia.

It was a typical tornado which sometimes visits the Ozark Mountains, obliterating entire villages and leaving destruction in its path wherever it strikes. For awe-inspiring grandeur the one that day had never been equalled, according to the consensus of opinion of the pioneers in that vicinity.

The sun during all the afternoon, now and then veiled behind evil-looking clouds, scorched and burned. Fitful winds came from every direction, but there was no coolness in any of them. Shortly after four o'clock ominous clouds began to float lazily across the sky. The wind blew stiffly from the northwest, but it did not seem to govern the fleecy precursors of the storm. They flitted to every point of the compass, some sailing by like

white-winged ships at sea, others lying at anchor like the great black hulls of war vessels. Then the sky in the north and west began to assume a sickly green color, the cast that makes the dweller on the prairies run to his storm-cellar, and furnishes a background for the deadly funnel-shaped cloud. But to the south the clouds were few and warmly tinted with the ruddy glow of the sun. A little later the ragged banks of green to the north and the west took on a brighter hue and hung closer to the earth. From out of the east drifted huge black shapes of vapor, laden with lightning, that flashed in sheets and forks.

A cool breeze sprang up, a breeze that seemed to have in it an odor of burnt leather; and the leaves fluttered, revealing their white linings, then drooped to a fitful rest.

The forces of the air, which had become portentous of a great storm, began to marshal for the attack upon the mountains. Long lines of clouds in array like trained soldiers suddenly ceased shifting from place to place and began a steady, swift procession for the west. Out of the southeast they came close to the earth, heavy and evil looking, breathing lightning. Lighter, more flurried, but none the less dangerous in appearance, they slid in long lines from the northeast, swiftly circling the clouds to the south, which revealed jagged edges of sun-whitened spray on their way to join the forces from the other side. The wind was rising and a most sublimely beautiful electric display was *in progress*. Against a background of various tints

of green, forks and sheets and luminous balls of fire, colored purple and red and blue, shot out, accompanied by dull, incessant roars of thunder. All the while to the south the sky remained bright and nearly clear, bathing the rugged crests of the mountains in a sea of saffron light.

When the advancing masses of clouds came together the air grew dark, and across the green vault overheard there seemed to be torn a rent of white light, twisting and turning, writhing like a huge serpent from north to south. Its dazzling brilliancy was blinding, but in the momentary glimpse that could be had of the attacking elements by its assistance, it was also seen that a long, funnel-shaped cloud was forming and that one end of it was rapidly descending toward the earth. All was confusion in the skies. Stray masses of clouds floating away off from the center of disturbance seemed to take life suddenly and fairly sail across the horizon to join the destructive mass in process of formation. As the darkness grew in intensity a slight rain was seen coming from the south; the wind seemed to shift to the east, and the dark army of the elements suddenly took up the march away toward the west. There was a brief patter of big, icy raindrops, and the velocity of the wind was rising to a gale, which, with a desolate moan, swept through the trees, unutterably sad—dreary as death.

The rear guard of the rapidly retiring army of clouds in the west shifted and twisted here and there as if waving a signal of retreat; the sky was

green again and out of the gloom came darts of orange flame which, for a moment, flared against the sable background like an aurora borealis.

But the watchers soon perceived that the army of the clouds was coming back. The retreat was a strategic move. Over the horizon just south of west came a horrible front of surging, flashing, angry clouds. Outriders of lightning led the way and galloping balls of fire ran in and out of the main ranks while the distant thunder rolled and rumbled like great war drums before the cannonade. The elongated shape of the column was lost, but the two armies were there, firmly packed together. Rain again pattered desperately for a few moments and ceased. On came the army, wildly plunging and tearing. The light green of the sky was hidden behind a solid wall of gray mist out of which long ropes of blue light rapidly unfolded and fell toward the ground with a deafening crash.

Then came the grand charge of the elements, the advancing army with a shriek dashing itself against the mountains. Thunder rolled like the boom of cannon and the air became densely dark. The lightning came into play like reserved forces of heavy field artillery and shot blazing bolts to the ground, shattering huge boulders into fragments and splintering giant trees from crest to root; and the forked flames which arose from isolated barns showed how well it was doing its work. Out of the low bank came arrowy drops, then sheets of rain that penetrated everything, while the big white hailstones trampled the fields with terrified

feet like the invincible rush of cavalry. For a moment midnight darkness hovered over the mountains.

The air was filled with light and heavy debris, tributes to the might of the wind. Buildings swayed and creaked in the powerful blast, which swept down the valleys, picked up vehicles and turned them over, bounded to roofs and lifted them up bodily, depositing them in neighboring fields, filled the air with flying timbers, uprooted great oaks, stripped towering pines of their gnarled limbs that had withstood the tempests of a century. On its swift wings were borne the horrified shrieks of frightened and injured men, women and children, but the Storm King did not heed as he grinned his fierce scorn on whatever lay in his path.

At last the forces of the air withdrew from the assault. Then the rain came down in torrents. It was a wonderful rain, a steady, pounding, penetrating rain that seemed to gather strength as it fell. Amid the horror and panic which prevailed in every household the rain came down harder and stronger, gloomily sounding a knell, and beating piteously upon the helpless and shelterless. It turned each creek into a mighty torrent and inundated the river valleys. Finally the downpour abated, the wind, which had assumed the magnitude of a tempest, was assuaged and the angry growls of thunder grew fainter, but the inky darkness lingered.

While the storm was gathering the Bald Knobbers were riding from all directions, intending to assemble in the gulch between Alki Bald and Cedar

Ridge, only a few miles from the jail. Most of them, seeing the threatening clouds, hurried to the rendezvous and reached the appointed place before the storm struck, finding shelter beneath the great ledges of shelving rocks which formed the immense bluffs on the east side of Cedar Ridge.

After the storm had spent its force one of the mountaineers addressed his chief in this manner :

"Say, chief ; hadn't we all better hike back home, fer no tellin' what this here harrycane has done—mebbe blowed everything away, including' the old woman and the younguns. Them fellers in jail ain't sufferin', nohow ; that's the best place fer 'em a time like this."

"Now is the very time to do the work, 'cause nobuddy would be expectin' us, an' we won't have to fight, 'sides the boys would have a better chanct to git away now than any other time," suggested another Bald Knobber before the chief could reply to the first.

"Our plans will be carried out as pre-arranged," answered the chief laconically.

"Shore, jest ez well go ahead—couldn't git to our cabins nohow tel the cricks run down," added one of the gang in support of what the leader had said.

So when the worst of the storm was over the rescuers mounted their horses and started toward the jail. It was so dark that they could scarcely find their way out of the narrow ravine, but in single file the long line of Bald Knobbers wended their way to the jail-yard.

Not a word was spoken as two score of men carried a long, seasoned elm log, an equal number of besiegers on either side, toward the jail. When a short distance from the building they quickened their steps into a run while two lines of men were formed at right angles on either side of the path leading from the door, to guard those with the improvised battering-ram in the event that they should be fired upon from the jail.

With a crash the heavy timber struck the iron door, severing the lower hinge. There was no noise from within. The besiegers retreated to their former starting place and made a second rush with the log, which jarred the door completely down. The battering-ram was thrown to the ground and four men with sledges entered the jail, followed by a half hundred men, none of whom were masked.

They met no resistance, which fact led some of the invaders to fear that they were being led into a trap; that the jail was filled with officers who wished to lure them inside where they would have a better chance to slaughter the mob. This suggestion was passed through the crowd and about half of those who had entered the building retreated to the jail-yard in order to give those who went to break into the cells ample room in which to escape in case they were fired upon.

The locks to the cell doors were found and the four men with the big hammers began pounding at them just as the jailer and several assistants appeared on the scene with blanched faces and eyes staring out of their sockets. They were so awed

at the sight of the overwhelming numbers of the rescuers and had been taken so completely by surprise that they offered no resistance and but few words were spoken. They had heard the crash at the door but thought little of it since their excitement from the great storm had not yet died away. They believed that it was the wind hurling a piece of timber against the door, and made no investigation.

"Goin' ter take 'em out, eh?" asked Lake Batewell, the old turnkey.

"Goin' ter give 'em a chanct. They don't hev ter go ef they don't want to, howsever," replied one of the men with the sledges.

"We all thought somethin' ort to be did fer 'em, an' this is the only thing we thought we could do," ejaculated another Bald Knobber.

When the cell doors were thrown open one of the rescuers said:

"You boys kin tear out of here now. This is a good time to git erway—you'll have all night to git the start of the officers, so come 'long. This is the last help we expect to give you all."

But the rescuers were surprised to find that only a few of the prisoners, among whom was Paul Tice, desired to escape. Most of them believed that they would never be punished for the crimes with which they were charged. If they attempted to escape and were caught and remanded to jail they believed their chances for lenity at the hands of the jury would be lessened, so they decided to stay.

"Aw, whut's the use—we'll git out soon enough, anyhow," said Red Doak.

"I'm a-goin' ter stay right yere and resk hit; don't 'pear ter be no cause fer alarm, nohow, ez I kin see," added Buck Amick.

"Ruther stay yere an' sleep," was the decision of another.

"What do you say about it, Wade?" Drexel was asked.

He walked to the door and looked out, as a dash of rain drenched his face and a cool gust of wind made him shiver.

"I'm not going out into any such rain and darkness as that. I would be taking my life in my hands, anyway. Besides if I were to make good my escape for a time, I would have to be on the alert the rest of my life and I had rather take my chances than to always be hiding in the woods, hunted like a wild beast. I want to stay here and fight my opponents to the last ditch, for I will soon be at liberty. Then I will want to settle up a few scores with an acquaintance or two in this neighborhood. If I were to run away I'd miss this chance to get even, so I guess I'll stay here," was Drexel's final answer.

And the Bald Knobbers rode away toward their homes which lay in all directions, having accomplished their plans without injury to anyone; for never a shot was fired, never a gun was drawn.

CHAPTER XXIV

FREEDOM REFUSED

News of the capture of the Bald Knobbers spread like wildfire, for the murdering of Sam West and Jim Baird, which had so stirred the whole country, called for punishment. The captured desperadoes composed that portion of the organization which could be classed as outlaws, for the major part of this vast league which extended well into four counties, numbering thousands of men, were opposed to such a raid as was made on the Baird home. So long as the members of this organization remained within the confines of the law, they experienced no trouble, but when some of their number overstepped its bounds, using the power of the order to gratify selfish desires and to give expression to their lawless natures, they brought punishment upon themselves and placed the entire league in bad repute, thus giving additional evidence of the justice of the universal code of retribution which has been in evidence throughout Christendom during the long march of civilization; for the violation of all law, whether civil, physical, moral, or spiritual, implies a penalty from which few escape.

But loyalty to its members was one of the strongest features of this league; those identifying themselves with it swore to assist and protect each

other in any and all emergencies; so there was a great gathering of Bald Knobbers one night, soon after the arrest of the alleged murderers, for the purpose of discussing the situation relative to giving aid to those of their number who had been lodged in jail. It was decided that they would not take chances with the law, but give the prisoners their freedom by force. A plan was subsequently decided upon whereby the jail was to be broken into and the captured Bald Knobbers be given a chance to escape.

The evening set apart for the carrying out of this plan was ideal for the purpose, for it was the time when a terrible electric storm or tornado visited the community, which fact lessened the chances for a fight with the officers at the jail or with the militia.

It was a typical tornado which sometimes visits the Ozark Mountains, obliterating entire villages and leaving destruction in its path wherever it strikes. For awe-inspiring grandeur the one that day had never been equalled, according to the consensus of opinion of the pioneers in that vicinity.

The sun during all the afternoon, now and then veiled behind evil-looking clouds, scorched and burned. Fitful winds came from every direction, but there was no coolness in any of them. Shortly after four o'clock ominous clouds began to float lazily across the sky. The wind blew stiffly from the northwest, but it did not seem to govern the fleecy precursors of the storm. They flitted to every point of the compass, some sailing by like

earthly vessels, and she was beginning to find that they were but empty pitchers. How many have found it so! On that lovely evening she had sought her chamber to weep, to pour out her sorrows where none could hear or deride her for her weakness. But the sound of a night bird reached her and she paused to listen, for he seemed to be chanting a requiem over the days of departed glories. Seating herself by the open window, she listened long to his melody, gazing at the scene spread out before her, frequently turning her eyes towards the sky. She felt that there was still happiness reserved for her, although she found it not where she had long sought it. Visions of the past glided swiftly through her imagination; far back to childhood years she seemed to be carried, until her whole life was scanned. Then, with tears of repentance for sinful deeds committed and unholy thoughts cherished, she knelt and prayed for forgiveness, after which she was happy, for she had found that there was a well-spring of purer joy than earth can afford, where she could drink and be satisfied. She did not love the beautiful in this world less than formerly, but she loved the heavenly more.

"Cornelia had been a leader in fashionable society," the Sister said as Westbrook's face became more animated, "and, being a woman of wealth, she had led a life of ease and luxury, had scorned to assist the poor, had never cared for the church and had spent no time in the interest of her soul's welfare until she became convinced of the fact that everything was hollow, a sham—nothing was satis-

fyng, and there was little good in anything pertaining to this world. She had loved and lost. She could not understand why fate decreed that such should be her lot; but upon analyzing the question carefully, she concluded that it was due to her unworthiness, her utter uncongenialty; her ideals were not high enough, and her heart was not steeped in the holy love that prompts altruistic deeds and acts calculated to ameliorate the condition of those whom fortune had favored less; in fact, she knew she was not worthy of the man she loved."

The Sister Superior wondered at the color that came and went in the visitor's face as she continued:

"So Cornelia was changed, and never was transformation more radical, complete or far-reaching. The next day her society friends who had lionized her so long were greatly surprised when they read in the daily papers of a magnificent gift made by her for the founding of a great institution for orphans and the homeless. Soon this munificent gift was followed by others until not only the homeless, but outcasts and the poverty-stricken aged were to be cared for through her kindness of heart. Hospitals and charitable institutions felt her uplifting influence. So lavishly did she bestow her competence for the benefit of the poor and the unfortunate that she could no longer be reckoned among the wealthy. She was no more to be seen among the associates of her earlier years, and her silk, ermine and sable wardrobe, also her costly jewels, were replaced with simple apparel and plain adorn-

ments. She was now to be found every day in the homes of the poor, caring for the fever-stricken babe in the unsanitary tenement, delivering a needed garment to some ragged urchin in a home of squalor, bringing some nourishing food to a bed-ridden mother of the slums who could no longer earn the meager daily pittance that was the sole support of her fatherless little ones. Cornelia's fingers were busy at home working on garments for the daughter of some poor family who, after spending her days in a grimy factory at some life-warping machine, was too tired at night to mend her own clothing. She also delivered hundreds of books for the education and cheer of the lowly."

Westbrook's face wore a still more puzzled look as the story continued:

"So kind has she been to the poor and down-trodden that she has won the familiar sobriquet of the 'Angel of Mercy,' and is hailed as such everywhere she goes among them. But Cornelia is merely the instrument of the angel of mercy who saved her in that darkest hour in her life when she stood on the brink of despair contemplating a leap into the gulf of oblivion which she fancied would relieve her suffering for ever, for she had permitted her sorrow and remorse to poison her better nature like a gangrene. At last, in her desperation, she penned a note of farewell to the world which she had found so cruel; then went out into the night and stood upon the great bridge that spans the Mississippi River and was about to leap to the awful eternity which beckoned and swirled below



Cornelia Burwell's first mission of mercy

her; but some unseen force—the good angel that strives for mastery in the life of everyone—repelled her at the last moment and she retraced her steps, deciding to live, to be brave and to suffer. Then it was that this message came to her heart bidding her drown her grief in the sorrows of others, and she found that the only panacea for a broken heart was in work; that the only surcease from sorrow was in doing good to others, eliminating all selfishness. Following this conviction, a wonderful change was wrought in her. A pleasant smile soon displaced her former cynical contortion of feature, which could scarcely have been designated as a smile; the hard, cruel lines of scorn and acrimony in her face were smoothed away to lineaments indexing a magnanimous heart, and the cold, unsympathetic light formerly seen in her eyes had changed to one of tenderness and kindliness. No grander character ever assumed the veil, and no worthier exponent of the Redeemer ever crossed the threshold of St. Aubin's Academy," concluded the Sister Superior as Westbrook arose as if in bewilderment and extended his hand indicating an impatience to say good-by.

"It is, indeed, a strange story of a remarkable woman. The lady in question is certainly not now the Cornelia Burwell I knew her to be only a year ago," he said falteringly.

As they passed down the long corridor they halted at the door of Cornelia's reception parlor, which was open and always welcome to all comers in search of aid, the Sister Superior desiring West-

brook to see the motto adopted by the "Angel of Mercy," which was the dominating factor in her new life, and the key-note of the story of her past experiences. Upon the wall in bold type, surrounded by a gilt frame, were the words:

"Serve Others and Be Happy."

CHAPTER XXVI

LIFE'S TRAGEDY

"Death is the gloom shrouding every light, the thorn secreted by every rose, the frown encroaching on every dimpled joy, the discord waiting to mar every song of love. It is the wizard converting sunshine to shadow, laughter to sobs, smiles to tears, happiness to despair, and life's rainbow of hope to clouds of tempest and tumult. It falls like frost on the daintiest flower, and smites with decay the sturdiest bough. Soft-footed and unseen, it lurks in the pathway of everyone. But within there is a buoyant dream, a tearful faith and a pathetically cherished hope of another existence beyond the grave. Therefore, in the immeasurable realms somewhere there must be that fact of correspondence of the mind here with the ideal there, that reality to justify and explain the universal dream. Life then becomes a thing so vast, so august, so eternal, in harmony and in correspondence with the immensity of the creation of God and our dream and conception of things, that even to be alive, to feel the thrill of ecstasy or the throb of pain, is joy beyond compare. The transition we have misnamed death, the grave, the separation, the agony and tears, are less than the faintest ripple on the surface of the everlasting sea of being. In our deep heart-solitudes, in our serious hours of

self-inspection and introspection, we have longings for the inscrutable, the untold, the uncompassed, and incomprehensible Divine Reality. In our purest and most exalted consciousness we are in communion with it. There are message-thoughts which come to us from it; soul-certainties of its existence. We marvel there should not be a voice, audible, actual, emanating from it. We question, but there is no reply. Here is the Divine Reality. He is the Ancient Silence! And yet will it always be so? Will not that voice be heard again when we, like her whose passing out we deplore, shall have cast off the robes and instruments of sense?—we will hear it and be satisfied.”

Thus wrote Bernard Westbrook to Angenette Clifton upon hearing of the untimely death of Bessie Ellsworth, which came in a manner that shocked the little community where she had spent her youth, and the hearts of all who knew her were darkened with grief, and a mist dimmed many an eye unused to tears.

Scarcely anything of the whereabouts of Bessie and Paul Tice had been known for some time. Some believed from the first, when their sudden disappearance was announced, that they had eloped, knowing the objections of her parents to the marriage. Those who knew better the questioned character of Paul believed that he had lured her away with his soft wheedling and later deserted her, for he had been seen more than once with Wade Drexel since the couple left the previous autumn, but he seemed to evade the gaze of the public as much as possible and never appeared upon the highways.

Paul Tice was of good parentage, and at an early age gave promise of becoming a man of worth and integrity, but he was ruined through the influence of bad associates, just as many another can attribute his downfall to such a cause. Drexel had a snake-like charm over him, and, being Paul's senior, was naturally his adviser. At first Drexel's ideas and plans were repulsive to him, but later he felt no pang of conscience after doing whatever Drexel suggested, however heinous. This is true with most criminals; the oftener thoughts of evil deeds are harbored, the less obnoxious and less impossible they appear to the mind, until finally the crime, which at first seemed too revolting to be considered, is committed.

Although that section of the Ozarks had long ago become used to the news of a crime, excitement ran high when the report was circulated to the effect that a beautiful golden-haired woman had been found dead, supposedly murdered.

Paul had told Bessie much, after their marriage, regarding his life of crime, but he had kept it all carefully concealed from her during their days of courtship. He had told her a great deal regarding the secrets of the Bald Knobbers, usually after he had been drinking. Liquor made him incautious and more daring, and gave him courage to commit crimes of which he otherwise would not have been guilty. The death of Bessie Ellsworth was afterwards attributed to him, although proof was lacking. He was never run down after escaping from jail the night the captive outlaws were offered their

freedom; but no fugitive from justice can flee from himself, and the pangs of remorse hounded him until, it is said, he took his own life while hiding in the cypress swamps of Arkansas.

It is believed that the crime was partly a result of the fact that she had threatened to desert him, which, indeed, she was returning home to do; also partly because she announced to him her intention of advising the officers regarding his life of lawlessness, together with that of his associates. He had trusted her with the secrets of the mysterious organization with which he was identified, believing that the confidence he reposed in her would never be betrayed. In a recent letter to Angenette Clifton she said:

"I was promised everything that seemed alluring. Paul told me he had inherited a valuable landed estate in the South where he used to live, and that we were going there; that he merely wanted to surprise his parents and mine; that we would soon come back and tell our friends here of our luxurious home. It was all a lie. Soon his disposition changed; instead of being the noble gentleman I believed him to be, I discovered that he was gradually transforming into a detestable brute. But it was too late, and I was too proud to come home humiliated."

It is the same old story of the moth and the flame, of going against the parents' will. The future to Bessie looked bright; she defied her father, loved Paul Tice, eloped with him; they were married. The brightness she thought she saw ahead

of her earlier days proved to be a mirage. A tragedy was the sequel.

Bessie had just returned to the mountains and had not yet visited her parental roof or had an opportunity to see any of her old acquaintances. None of her friends knew that she had come back until her lifeless body was identified.

The couple arrived at the Black Eagle hotel in Forsyth shortly after nightfall. The landlord's daughter immediately ministered to the beautiful young wife, who complained of being tired from the long journey across country. She soon retired and was not seen again until late the following day, when she was found—dead.

With her hands crossed upon her breast, her eyes closed, the woman was lying naturally and in an easy position on a bed as if enjoying a sound, sweet sleep, while the bright spring sunshine streamed through the window and flooded the room. This was shortly before noon. The landlord's daughter stole over to the window and gently lowered the shades to protect the face of the supposed sleeper, believing that she was still too weary from her journey to leave the room.

Between three and four o'clock the girl went again to the room, knocked—there was no answer. She quietly opened the door and entered. She saw that the woman was still in the same position she was in upon her former visit, but her features had begun to purple and darken. Noticing this, she made a closer inspection. Fear, like a blight, seized upon her heart, and she ran into the hall, shrieking at the top of her voice:

"She's dead! She's dead!"

The proprietor of the Black Eagle hastened to the chamber; a deputy constable soon arrived, and speculation began as to how this beautiful young woman had met her fate.

Who she was, no one knew. A search was made. Was there a clew to her identity? None.

Then came the coroner. Only a cursory glance was necessary to tell his experienced eyes how the unfortunate woman had died. Murdered! Death had apparently sealed her eyelids while asleep and she had not moved.

How sad was the thought as one gazed upon her that less than a year ago she was a happy, modest girl. Then she placed her trust in an arch-fiend, who was fated to so tragically shape her life. In years Paul was but little older than Bessie, but he was old in experience, and the innocent girl listened to his smooth pleadings and learned to love him. She had relatives and friends wiser than she and more than one voice warned her against him, while her father forbade him to enter his home. But once again love proved stronger than reason and she went with him to Arrow Point, where they were united as one, "for better, for worse." He was young, but not too young to be a criminal and an adventurer, so the quiet life with the girl he had taken from her father's home soon palled on him and he sent her to relatives in the Mammal Mountains, and for weeks at a time he would absent himself with gay companions. At first she bore her lot patiently; then she often remonstrated

and begged Paul to lay aside his evil ways. But his idleness and debauchery continued and as a last resort she compelled him to answer in court to a charge of non-support. He took the matter quietly, only turning to Bessie and saying :

“Sometime I’ll repay you for this.”

How well he succeeded in carrying out his fiendish threat the cold corpse mutely testified.

And thus, in her sleep, the young wife of Paul Tice was murdered by the man who had sworn to her that he would “love, honor and protect.”

“My child! Oh, my child! My dear daughter, how can I bear to see you buried?”

It was at Bessie’s funeral that the aged, grief-stricken mother gave vent in this manner to her fullness of heart. She clasped the casket that held all that was mortal of her once beautiful daughter, and wildly sobbed :

“I hope I can pull the rope if they hang the fiend that took you from me, which, God knows, they should do!”

Then, turning to the crowd of sorrowing, sympathetic women who had gathered near—many of them mothers with grown daughters, who felt keenly the grief of the mother whose child was dead—she added :

“But I had rather know that she is lying here—dead—than to have her live with the wretch who lured her away from me when she was but a child.”

The father, a stalwart man, said nothing; but his usual ruddy face was pale and showed unmistakably the trace of sorrow’s hand, and his sad,

tear-dimmed eyes told the story of a broken heart that his lips could not utter.

The humble but cozy home of the Ellsworths was thronged with friends and mourners. Never before had that community seen a greater crowd at a funeral. Most of the sympathizing friends strolled outdoors, bareheaded, beneath tender and splendid skies. It was a Sabbath-like day, mellow with the richness of the genial month of flowers.

And the minister lovingly pronounced words of comfort and blessing upon the household, and petitioned the Shepherd who said, "I am the resurrection and the life," and who giveth His beloved sleep, to remember the one for whom they sorrowed.

Little Margaret, sister of the murdered girl, looked inquiringly into the face of the venerable man of God; she did not know what it all meant, but cried as if her heart would break.

Wreaths of wild flowers—those Bessie had expressed a fondness for and had been accustomed to gather during her girlhood days, were banked about the little room and surrounded the silver tablet on the coffin lid, over the folded hands, bearing a word of only four letters, but which is as vast in meaning as eternity—"Rest."

Then, slowly and sadly, with solemn steps, the pallbearers carried the once lovely daughter out from the white cottage hid among clambering rose vines, over the shady lawn where she had played away the happy hours of innocent childhood, placed the casket in the darkly draped wagon, and moved

away. The final scene in the life drama of one of the fairest of the rural maids was about to close.

Gently, over the green mounds in beautiful Riverview Cemetery, the westering sun cast his parting beams as if in benediction. The mother expressed her grief in many sad farewells, swooned, and they bore her away. Then was heard the low chant of a simple funeral dirge; there was a dull thud of clods upon a long pine box; "ashes to ashes, dust to dust"; then all was still. Life's tragedy for Bessie Ellsworth had ended!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TRIAL

There never was a trial in all the Ozark region which attracted nearly so much attention as that of the Bald Knobbers. Every day during its progress the old brick court-house was crowded to overflowing with spectators—with the wives and children of some of the accused, with those whose friends had been victims of some raid by the desperadoes, by all classes of mountaineers—wild, shaggy, unkempt looking fellows, most of them. There they stood side by side, those strange men, for the seats would not accommodate all who wished to hear, and listened while their confederates were being arraigned. Nor was there ever a better or more determined array of legal talent known in any trial in the southern part of the state. It was to be no farce, no travesty on justice this time—the case was to be stubbornly contested to the bitter end.

Bernard Westbrook was retained by the state to assist in the prosecution. He was to try the real perpetrators of the crimes for which he was at first charged and imprisoned. The two bitter rivals for the hand of a fair woman again met under the strangest of conditions. Westbrook was in the zenith of his powers. Never did any prosecuting attorney have a more able assistant or a more

assiduous investigator, for this brilliant young St. Louis attorney put his whole energy and soul into the work, partly because he knew that the desperadoes charged with the double murder of Jim Baird and Sam West were unquestionably guilty and should be punished, and partly because he was spurred to do his uttermost, remembering the injustices, the suffering and the many narrow escapes from death he had experienced through the perfidy, the desire for revenge and the bitter hatred of Wade Drexel, recognized as the most desperate and dangerous of the defendants. However, he sought to try the case solely on its merits, leaving personal animosities in the background. So with unswerving energy and indefatigable effort he collected evidence against the Bald Knobbers, and it was soon seen that he was the real motive force on the state's side of the case.

Wade Drexel entered the court-room with an indifferent air, but his face wore a more animated expression when he saw Westbrook; then he stopped almost tragically. The men looked oddly at each other. But the desperado soon regarded his old adversary with undisguised amusement, and turned to Angenette Clifton with a puzzled frown, giving way to a look of abject terror, for the whole world, which had not so very long ago seemed brighter to him, or at least less cruel, became bathed in gloom. There she sat, the ideal of his soul; while he thought how the one flower of his life, the flower of love, had been torn up and withered for ever. This spoke to his disconsolate heart in

an inaudible language that was answered by a frown.

For a time Angenette felt a little pity. She had seen the agony of his despair banish the last gleam of sunshine on his white, set face, but recalling all his wanton wickedness and his revolting crimes, she desired to see him justly punished. And her testimony against him and the rest of the gang did much to establish their guilt. But the most damaging witness against the Bald Knobbers was Mrs. Sam West, wife of one of the murdered men. She had only recently recovered from the wounds received the night of the raid, but she told how she had torn the mask from Red Doak's face, clearly identifying him. This fact led to Doak's turning state's evidence against his associates.

Stephen Baird, the old man, who was so badly butchered, was able to give valuable testimony at the trial, having miraculously recovered, although he was ever afterward subject to epileptic fits as a result of the wounds inflicted by Drexel.

Erastus Johnson, a young negro, was among the witnesses.

"You say you saw a band of horsemen, alleged to have been these defendants, coming from the Baird home on the night of the murder. Are you sure it was the same night?" asked the attorney for the defense on cross-examination.

"Yaas, sah, I shore seed 'em."

"Where had you been, 'Rastus?"

"Can't rec'lect."

"You surely can remember if you try."

"I dun b'en ter Squire Swadlow's house, sah."

"For what purpose had you visited Mr. Swadlow?"

"Ter buy a fowl fer breakfas', sah."

"What time of night did you see the men?"

"'Bout de middle ob de night."

"Is it the custom for the people in the community where you reside to buy poultry at that time of night?"

"Yaas, sah, hit's der cus-cus-sum, 'specially 'mongst culled folks."

"You are sure that one of the men pointed a revolver at you as he rode past?"

"Yaas, sah."

"Was it a large weapon?"

"All dem guns looked big ter me, boss."

"How many men did it seem to you composed that band of horsemen?"

"'Peared ter be 'bout a million, sah."

Old Eph Hubb was summoned to give an account of what he had heard and seen on the night of the raid when he met the Bald Knobbers some distance from the Baird home.

"What time of night was it when you met the men in question?" asked the attorney.

"Cac-late ez how hit war sometime 'twixt sun-down an' midnight."

"Can't you approximate the time any more closely than that?"

"Cac'late ez how I can't."

"Who was with you, and where had you been?"

"My old woman. We'd b'en ter mill down on Swan Crick an' to Yank Doty's distillery."

"Oh, yes, I thought so."

"Don't give a durn whut yo' thought."

"How far from the Baird home were you when you met the men?"

"Cac'late ez how hit war 'bout fo' mile."

"How does the road run from where you saw them to the Baird residence—straight?"

"'Ceptin' whar hit crooks."

"Did you hear any firing of guns either before or after you met the men on horseback?"

"Reminded me o' when I fit the Mexicans back in the fo'ties, when my reg'mint charged ep—"

"But hold on," interrupted the state's attorney. "You were not summoned here to recite a history of the Mexican War."

"Guess I'll say whut I durned please."

"Do you know anything regarding the visit of these defendants to the home of Stephen Baird?" inquired the attorney after a pause.

"Ez I wuz a-sayin', I thought the Mexicans had charged on me and—"

Here the judge pounded fiercely with his gavel and ordered the attorneys to call another witness.

What hopes of escaping punishment the Bald Knobbers may have had at the commencement of the trial were shattered after the testimony had all been presented and Bernard Westbrook had begun his masterful plea on behalf of the state; for it was believed that the jury of twelve stern men would not be biased in their decision, but that their verdict would be rendered on the merits of the case. They were visibly affected by the eloquence of the cool, unerring young attorney.

It was the most trying experience of Wade Drexel's life when he was compelled to sit mute and defenseless and hear his hated rival, his bitter enemy, his detested opponent, make an address about him and against him, denouncing him as the most obnoxious of wretches, the most brutal of assassins and the vilest fiend among villains.

"Oh, if I had only known that I should ever come to this, how different it would be with all of us today! I would have killed him long ago; fool that I was," Drexel said to himself as he sat and listened to the assistant attorney for the prosecution expose his life of crime to the jury. The words of Westbrook withered him like a blight, making him stir uneasily, and frequently a grayish pallor crept over his face. At times he shot a malignant glance at the man he hated, from under shaggy, knotted brows of scorn.

Westbrook's face was flushed with animation, as with his accustomed emphasis, he painted in fiery words a black picture of the villain and his crime, later including the whole gang of desperadoes in his bitter arraignment.

The attorney described Drexel as he saw him, a monster with a coward's heart, a wretch who pretended reformation when he was caught in crime, a perjured scoundrel who would deprive a fellow-being of life, and make more widows and orphans, a sneaking craven, who never did a courageous act in his life, who had skulked by night to kill—who shot a poor old man in cold blood.

"A state's most important function is to protect property and safeguard life," Westbrook began. "No greater responsibility rests upon the government than in the enforcement of its laws. The executive authority of the state cannot be better employed than in throwing about the homes of its children the mantle of its protection, for does it not guarantee to shield every citizen? Under its ægis the humblest as well as the highest claims security from the incursions of the lawless.

"There seems to be running through this case an attack upon everyone, high and low, connected with the prosecution. The evidence here presents the strongest plea for a verdict of guilty. For this reason I do not need to attempt a logical course of reasoning nor a flight of oratory in presenting new facts to your minds. I shall simply call your attention to the evidence. One thing is true in this case, one thing is not disputed, and that is an appalling condition of affairs has existed in this mountain country for the past three years. Many murders have been committed, and not one person has been brought to justice. Why? Because the perpetrators of these crimes had sufficient cause for their acts to justify them in the eyes of the law? Or was it because those defying the law were too numerous and influential for those who did respect the legal statutes of this state to punish? The epidemic of lawlessness which has broken out in various parts of the Union in the guise of self-styled regulators and which in this state has found expression in Bald Knobberism, should be suppressed,

and it will be to the credit of Missouri if she promptly administers the punishment prescribed by law for the commission of outrages like the Baird-West murder. Therefore, I hope, gentlemen of the jury, you will be as fearless and courageous in your deliberations in this case as we have been in finding the source of these crimes. Bald Knobbism must be broken up and those members who have done these horrible deeds must be punished. You jurors here in the Ozarks are sitting in judgment on a case that will be historical. Your verdict will affect the weal or woe of the southern part of this state. Truly you are making history. Your verdict will exert a great influence on the liberty and rights of the poor and lowly of these mountains. The integrity and manhood of Missouri are now at stake."

Absolute quiet reigned in the court-room, everyone leaned forward to catch each word of the speaker, who slowly and skillfully prepared the jury for the main argument he had to offer. Everyone was fascinated by the well modulated, earnest, sincere tone of his voice.

"Two men have been foully murdered, and we know who killed them," Westbrook continued. "Determined men have sought to fix these crimes, not merely to show that the laws of this state cannot be trampled under foot, but because the heinousness of the crimes themselves demand severest punishment. We do not know all the men implicated in these ghastly deeds, but we should punish to the limit those whom we do know. These base outlaws

took an instrument of murder, which a certain school of philosophy in this country regards as a higher law even than the Bible—the 'six-shooter'—and laughed in the face of justice.

"These dangerous, depraved criminals who sit here insolently in the presence of this court should not be permitted to terrorize this locality longer. God knows if the freedom of these dare-devils should be announced it would be a sore day for the families and loved ones of the two murdered men. The birds will not sing to them the day you set these vicious culprits free; the flowers will shed no fragrance for them that day; there will be for ever a cloud of gloom over the heavens for them. Think, gentlemen of the jury, of these widows. Think of the dark future of the wives of those murdered men. They must drag out a miserable existence with no strong arms to assist, to protect, to comfort them, all because of the unwarranted crime of Wade Drexel, this craven, this vulture, and his associates. Picture, if you can, the cheerless fireside through the long Decembers of the years to come when these poor little ones and their heart-broken mothers, wearing the dark habiliments of woe, with care-worn faces and sad eyes, sit there alone, feeling that there is no one near to soothe their griefs and fears in the person of a father and husband—a broken circle for ever with only the heritage of a memory which brings sadder thoughts of a horrible night when those they most loved were slain without cause. There will nevermore be any sunshine for those homes. These young women, whose hus-

bands sleep yonder in the little church-yard, can never again greet at the threshold the ones they love, as in the happy hours of the past when the day's labor in the fields was done. That little darling over there with the violet eyes and golden curls will never again be permitted to climb upon her loving father's knee to be teased and adored. She cannot lay her soft cheeks against his face nor be rocked to sleep in his arms. Think of the rough path over which her little feet must go with no father's hand to guide her from day to day!"

Audible sobs came from different parts of the court-room, several men in the jury-box hung their heads and even the trial judge, a white-haired, dignified, grave but kindly-faced man, turned in his chair and looked out of a window, far across the blue-rimmed hills—to hide a tear.

"When Wade Drexel shot down the defenders of a happy home, then it was that he crowned his infamy with the most brutal, the most wicked act of his life of crime," resumed Westbrook, pointing dramatically to the cowering outlaw who sat before him, evidently ill at ease. "He and the other perpetrators of these murders were not surprised and taken off their guard by any uncontrollable temptation. They were not burning with the fever of rage when they went to the Baird home, but were cool and calculating. The question of revenge is too absurd to be given any credence, for the victims of this arch-fiend and his associates had never harmed any of them. Has it not been proved that the murders for which these men are held were not

committed in the heat of passion, on the highway, nor in the open day, but after apparently well-formed judgment, in the solemn hours of night and at the fireside of the family? The sanctity of a home was invaded and the blood of those who had lain down in peaceful slumber shed within their dwelling place. The attack had little, if any, provocation, and no reasonable explanation has even been offered."

The assistant prosecutor's speech was, at this point, frequently punctuated by sighs from some of the relatives of the Bald Knobbers or the survivors of the families where they had left their mark of blood. The stillness was profound in the court-room, which was closely packed with spectators, and an equally large crowd had gathered near the open windows on the outside.

After a brief pause to examine a page of testimony, the plea before the jury was resumed.

"The testimony given here presents few, if any, palliating circumstances. It shows that a meeting of a score or more of armed and hideously masked men was held and that for two hours they consulted together; that the members of the meeting departed from the place of assemblage in a direction different from the one in which lay the homes of the leaders and many of the men; that although preconcerted action has not been proved upon their arrival at the home of Stephen Baird, when they reached there they fired into the window, and, breaking down the doors, rushed in like bloodthirsty savages, discharging their firearms; that efforts of the

inmates to protect themselves from this invasion were futile against the overpowering number and arms of their assailants; that the family, not charged with being other than harmless, honest, law-abiding, and whose only offense had been occasional expressions of disapproval of the methods of the Bald Knopper organization, was aroused from its slumber at the dead of night and butchered over its own hearthstone; that the son and son-in-law were murdered, the father felled and left for dead; that the daughter only escaped with her life owing to the alertness of her defense, and that the daughter-in-law was seriously injured.

"That all those who engaged in this attack, this fiendish crime, are equally guilty cannot be denied, but the fact that the state will be compelled to grant immunity to some of the accomplices in order to convict other, if not more guilty, offenders, should not relieve from punishment those whose guilt has been proved here. It was a conspiracy, the parties to which were masked and bound together with a terrifying oath attended by ceremonies calculated to impress the subscriber with a deep sense of the solemnity of his obligation.

"I feel that if I do not do my duty in proving these men guilty of their enormous crimes against high Heaven I shall be stalked by a dogging Nemesis for ever, and I would bear through life a bosom burdened and darkened with bitter compunction of conscience, and followed by a remorse as relentless as the fierce cormorant pursues the albacore; for I would feel that I had disregarded my

obligations to the law, my duty to humanity and to myself. Such men as these desperadoes, who bear upon their foreheads the awful curse of Cain, are burning libels on society and should not be permitted to longer pollute it; they must not be allowed to escape paying the just penalty for their crimes. The innocent blood they have spilled is crying to Heaven for vengeance."

Amid the breathless silence that followed Westbrook's address, Wade Drexel settled back in his seat and covered his face, which looked sadly burdened, with his hands, for the words had fallen on his ear like the clank of a chain drawn through the snow, and one after one his confederates, those grim, sturdy mountaineers, shambled out silently or sat staring vacantly and abstractedly over the fields. Red Doak shrugged his shoulders and hung his head. Buck Amick now manifested an uneasy manner, but during most of the bitter arraignment in which he had been branded as a soulless wretch and a bloodthirsty demon, listened with a deaf ear, apparently unmoved. Some of the women spectators, at times, could hardly suppress an impulse to scream, so vivid had the picture of the awful deeds of the outlaws been painted and held up before their horror-stricken gaze.

The judge's instructions to the jury were brief, unbiased, and apparently impartial. He clearly interpreted the law governing such cases and impressed upon the jury the fact that every phase of the case should be carefully and conscientiously weighed in the light of cool, unprejudiced reason, before rendering a verdict.

Then the bailiff, a thick-set man with steady gray eyes, in a deep bass voice commanded the jury to follow him, and they filed out of the court room, that body of stalwart, stern-visaged men, all of whom had felt the powerful cogency of Westbrook's speech, for the purpose of deciding the fate of the several prisoners.

While waiting for the jury to return the spectators were in a fever of suppressed anxiety. Everyone evinced a nervousness, and on the faces of some a pronounced pallor rested, while others constantly glanced at the door through which the jury must re-enter the room. Each of the accused outlaws was visibly affected, although they stared at the floor and scarcely moved.

Finally, after an hour's deliberation, a pounding was heard at the door, the bailiff turned the key in the lock and the men, in whose hands rested the fate of the prisoners, assembled before the bench.

"Gentlemen, have you reached a verdict?" inquired the judge in a faltering tone of voice.

"We have, your Honor," replied the foreman, handing the document to the clerk of the court, who unfolded it and announced the jury's decision.

"We, the jury, find the defendants guilty, as charged in the indictments."

This meant that Wade Drexel, who was charged with first degree murder, must die on the gallows; that Buck Amick and Red Doak, indicted for murder in the second degree, must serve long terms in the penitentiary, and that the other members of the

gang, charged with the double murder, would be given short sentences in the state prison, terms of various length in the local jail and both heavy and light fines.

Bald Knobberism had received its death blow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL

The marriage of Bernard Westbrook and Angenette Clifton was celebrated with great pomp, not in the Ozarks where the scenes of their tumultuous wooing occurred, but thousands of miles away in St. Petersburg. It was universally regarded as one of the most brilliant events of the social season there, having been attended by the nobility, ambassadors and people of note in general. The ceremony was not performed in a vine-embowered mountain home like that in which Angenette had passed her girlhood days, but in one of the grandest cathedrals in all Europe, for the bride had recently come into her proper inheritance. She was no longer the queen of the Ozarks, as she had frequently been alluded to by the enthusiastic groom, but she was now a duchess in the land of her ancestors and the possessor of a vast estate there.

It happened in this way :

Wilfred Clifton had told Westbrook the story, meager and fragmentary, of Angenette's lineage; how her grandfather, a nobleman, fled from Russia to avoid what he feared would ultimately result in his banishment to Siberia for political reasons, leaving everything behind; how he died soon after coming to Canada, where he sought liberty, and in a

few years Angenette's parents also died, leaving her the sole heir to the title and the estate. Clifton had supposed that the estate had been confiscated and that it would be impossible for him to regain it for the girl he had adopted and to prove that she was the legal bearer of the title of duchess.

One day Angenette inadvertently discovered an old package of papers locked in an iron box, which had remained unopened, where it had been placed in the big chest consigned to the garret when the family had moved to their Ozark home. It seems that Clifton had never seen them before, notwithstanding the fact that he had been entrusted with them at the death of Angenette's parents. The peculiar stamps upon the package aroused the girl's curiosity and she inquired whether they were of value. Clifton did not know, but Westbrook's practiced legal eye soon discovered that they were of immense value, revealing a claim to a title of nobility and to property rights.

Scarcely any attempt had ever been made in Russia to locate the legal heirs. A few efforts in this direction were once begun, but soon abandoned since no clew could be discovered tangible enough to be considered and worked out, so it remained for Bernard Westbrook to clear the matter up; this he set about to do when he heard the strange story of the heiress's ancestry. Step by step he secured all the necessary evidence and presented the proofs, which were so indisputable that scarcely any antagonism was encountered or any opposition offered.

Angenette was looked upon as one of the most beautiful ladies of title in the realm. Her stately figure, liveness, fresh beauty, lustrous eyes, and her freedom of manner which had been instilled in her through a life in the mountains, coupled with the unconventional vivacity of the West, all combined to make her an object of wonder and fascination. Her unusual traits of character, charm of personality and many admirable qualities of temperament soon attracted suitors from the ranks of the nobility, but she promptly and decisively discouraged any such advances, preferring to remain true to the man whom she had long worshiped as her ideal.

From the first Angenette was lionized in her new home. This was very largely due to the fact that her uncle, Grand Duke Ivan Kostoff, who had long been a court favorite and one of the most influential and popular men of the Russian Empire, had received her at his palace, formally introduced her into court society and had presented her to the Czar and Czarina. This insured her access to the highest social circles of the land and wherever she was received, Westbrook was welcomed with almost equal cordiality. Although they were in a strange land, in the most unnatural environment and often placed in trying positions, they quickly conformed to new conditions, customs and manners, made rapid progress, through private tutors, in mastering the difficult language, and by close observation and assiduous efforts were enabled to play their parts in their new world. They were for some time naturally reserved, careful, painstaking

and vigilant, being admired only the more for their simplicity, modesty and, withal, ease of manner. But they were at times bewildered, almost dazed with the court splendor and the luxury of their new-found friends. In the American quarter of the capital of the Czar, where our heroine was known only by her recently acquired title, the Duchess Angenette of Morzova, she and Westbrook were received with great ceremony and friendliness, when it became known that they were late of America.

All St. Petersburg put on its most festive garb for the marriage of the newly-discovered duchess. Gay scarves and flags fluttered from windows and balconies; banners of Russia and the United States, heavy with silk and embroidery, swung from hundreds of painted Venetian masts. The gray-stone cathedral of St. Ascla was never the scene of a more brilliant or costly wedding ceremony. The spectators were privileged to behold the most lavish floral decorations that were, perhaps, ever seen on a similar occasion even in lands of much sunshine and many flowers. Easter lilies and white satin ribbon were combined artistically about the quaint Gothic edifice. Bermuda lilies, the bride's favorite flower, were in profusion. Florists from the Canary Islands came to lay a carpet of flowers on the street over which the wedding procession was to pass. The walls were hung with massive festoons of delicately tinted flowers. The interior of the great cathedral was hung with gold embroidered tapestries, and the carpet of crimson velvet was

edged with gold. Although a flood of sunshine bathed the immense chapel dome, the inside was lighted by hundreds of candles in ornamental designs, showing the delicate costumes or brilliant uniforms of persons belonging to the royal families of Russia or the principal nobility, ministers, members of the Council, representatives of the Holy Synod, and a number of generals and admirals. The American ambassador was present in the diplomatic circle. The guests whom the Grand Duke Kostoff had invited were all drawn up in line in the cathedral, having gathered for the occasion from all parts of the empire.

The immaculate wedding dress of the young duchess was a dream of loveliness, scintillating in silver myrtles; and her robe of state was a thing of beauty, embroidered in gold, trimmed with Russian sable and lined with ermine.

Bernard Westbrook, her consort, looked the part of the nobleman, which in reality he was, gauged by the standards that are employed to measure men in his native country. At least he was regarded by his titled bride as the noblest of all the noblemen of the empire or the world, as well. So he was happy whether the blood of ancient princes coursed through his veins or not, for he knew that he held the title to the heart of a matchless woman and, being thus rich in the possession of such a love, what else on earth could matter?

The bride and groom, although dazzled and well-nigh overwhelmed, bore their part with rare grace and presence of mind, apparently composed and assured.

Betrothed couples in St. Petersburg and other Russian cities made arrangements to be married on the same day of this wedding, considering it a time of good omen. The fetes and processions arranged by the people of the capital city were a quaint mingling of the medieval and modern. Few titled women were ever shown greater hospitality or given a more hearty demonstration of regard than was the Duchess Angenette of Morzova. She was presented, by the royal guests, a magnificent necklace of jewels, and the bridegroom was given a sword with a jeweled hilt, the scabbard carved with allegorical figures.

After the ceremony had been performed the air resounded with the clamor and clash of huge iron-throated bells in merry chimes from a hundred cathedrals and mosques.

A romantic spot was chosen for the signing of the marriage register in the ruins of an ancient, ivy-covered monastery, adjoining the cathedral of St. Ascla. In the cloisters of the monastery there is a moss-grown fountain, and by it stands a quaint desk on which the register is placed. The approach was richly carpeted and hung with costly tapestries. In this quiet, historic place, the young couple and their witnesses, immediately after the wedding, registered their signatures, which was the last act in the happy realization of love's young dream in two hearts.

Bernard Westbrook, who was by nature and training aggressive, self-reliant, and imbued with a desire to win success partly for the exercise of

his innate faculties and partly because he was impressed by a duty to foster and encourage a development of the worthy attributes of others, was not content to cease his life of action in the world's affairs; but the power he had set in motion in his young manhood days, his true American spirit, continued to assert itself and he soon began to speculate as how best to employ his talents in his new field of endeavor. There was no lack of work to be done in ameliorating existing conditions in the land of oppression where the march of mind had been halted and misery reigned on every hand, which seemed to him to be altogether unwarranted and appalling. He deplored lacking opportunities for the youth of the empire to realize their ambition, the impossibility of a great character springing from the masses; everything seemed to be just the antithesis of conditions in his native land. He was offered an exalted place, by the Czar, first among the ministers, then in the Council of the Empire and later in the Senate, each representing the high administration, being the three distinct councils uniting the supreme legislative, executive and judicial powers of Russia. But Westbrook saw no chance in any such positions to exercise his full capacities, to gratify his high ambitions to serve humanity in the most effective manner, so they were in turn declined. He could not sear his own conscience, after having lived among the free institutions of a republic, by professing allegiance to an absolute and strongly centralized monarchy. He devoted considerable attention to bettering the condition in every

way possible of the down-trodden peasants, artisans and those whose rights were disregarded by the reigning autocracy. He found not only inspiration in his altruistic work, but a very able ally, in his wife, and adroitly and effectively did they carry out their plans for the betterment of the misguided and ignorant people of the empire, in such a manner as not to incur the displeasure of the Czar or his advisors. They made the most of their opportunity to leave the imprint of their personalities on the lives of those with whom they came in contact. A characteristic feature of the intellectual movement in Russia was the establishment by them of free institutions of learning for women where careful instruction in natural and social sciences could be obtained. They promulgated academies of science, societies of naturalists, and began much other noble work which was far-reaching in results and which endeared them to thousands who were aided thereby. But they could not be content to live continuously away from their native country, therefore they spent the major part of their time in their home land, where Westbrook continued to exercise his highly developed legal talent, winning national fame in cases of great import. They maintained a cozy cottage in the Ozarks where they repaired each year, especially during the splendor of the autumn time, away from the exactions of the busy world, finding perennial youth amid nature's unpolished charms.

Much of their possessions across the sea were appropriated in furthering the laudable work they

had begun, not only in that country but in America also, for they deemed it a rare privilege to be thus permitted to sow seeds that would result in a harvest of golden blessings to those who should reap throughout the generations to come.

Although their villa in the distant empire combined all that wealth could make attractive, standing on an imposing eminence overlooking the beautiful Duna River, on either side of which lay rich vineyards and fertile fields, it was such a change from the old life, that always in the midst of its luxury the newly titled lady longed for the Ozarks instead—to leave it all and dwell among them for ever; indeed, when absent from them, she never ceased to sigh for their great woods and clear streams, for their blue skies and rugged steeps. And the joys and sorrows, the victories and defeats, of their romantic days in those picturesque mountains never wholly gave way to the larger life for which they had longed in their youthful dreams and which was subsequently theirs; but whether amid the delightful scenes of Angenette's childhood or surrounded by the pomp of exalted social life they were happy in each other's love, their lives gliding on like the peaceful river that flowed through their estate, and perpetual sunshine was their heritage.

THE END





NOV 14 1945



